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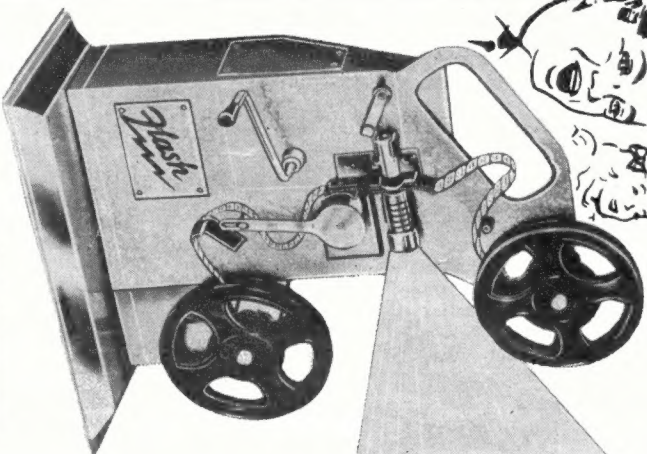
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Volume 19

SEPTEMBER, 1958

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IDEAL LOVE STORIES, September, 1953, published bi-monthly by Columbia Publications Inc., 1 Appleton St., Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices, 241 Church Street, New York 13, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass. Title registered U. S. Pat. Off. Yearly subscription \$1.50, single copy 25c. Entire contents copyright 1958 by Columbia Publications, Inc. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelope to insure return if not accepted and while reasonable care will be exercised in handling them, they are submitted at author's risk. Printed in the U. S. A.

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"Only a fool fights a losing game," Mike told his great-aunt. But even as he said it, he knew he didn't mean it.

Tempestuous Novelette

TRAPPED BY A REDHEAD

by DIANE
BALLINGER

THERE WERE none of the reporters from the *Daily Leader* in the Fourth Estate Cafe when Mike walked in. But at the end of the counter a shaft of late afternoon sun shone on the brightest red hair he'd ever seen. The rest of the girl was perfect too. The legs wrapped around the stool were long and slim, just the way Mike liked them. She had a wonderful bone-structured face and an enchanting profile, though her chin was a little too stubborn for his taste.

When she didn't turn to glance at him he said, "What's new, Al?"

The counterman had already drawn black coffee for him. "Nothin' for the headlines," Al answered as he had some ten thousand times before.

Mike slid on a stool and raised a questioning eyebrow and nodded toward the girl. Al shrugged and set a double portion of chocolate cake in front of him. Mike looked at the girl again and this time she turned her red head toward him, then she got off the stool. He liked the way she moved and he was a man who noticed such things.



"I don't believe you," she whispered.
"Somehow, I just can't — believe you."

"Excuse me," she said. "Are you Mike O'Brien?"

He got up. "That I am," he admitted happily. Her eyes were actually green and her lashes long and curling.

"I'm Debby Stewart." She waited for it to mean something to him and when it didn't she said, "D. C. Stewart to be exact."

He looked at her, then understanding came. He made a noise that sounded something "Ugg." After a minute he said, "You're a reporter on the *Graphic*? And here I thought you were a man." He grinned.

"That was the purpose of the initials," she informed him. "I've been writing from Hollywood ever since I joined the paper, but I'm here now." He looked at her closely and couldn't figure out why she should be so frosty to him. "I've been just waiting to meet you, Mr. O'Brien. I can't rest easy until I give you a piece of my mind."

"Go ahead," he said and the sparks in her eyes didn't auger well for a good and lasting friendship. He put his hand on her elbow. "Sit down and have some coffee while you bawl me out."

"I'll stand," she said icily and her shoulders squared. "I don't thank you, Mr. O'Brien, for having my step-brother, Guy Chandler, fired. It was unfair and cruel."

He knew there was no one worse to argue with than a very angry, indignant girl, and he wished he could go back to his chocolate cake. "To begin with," he said quietly, "I didn't fire Guy. The chief did, after six months of his being a bad reporter, who was not only lazy but drank like there was no tomorrow."

"Everybody on the *Ledger* had a hand in his firing," she said bitterly. "But you were the worst. You took the McLane story away from him, knowing that story would establish him as a really good newspaperman."

Mike said disgustedly, "I did no such thing. I was put on the story be-

cause for days nobody could find your step-brother."

"Well, I'm in town now," she told him vehemently, "and I'm going to see to it that I pay you back for what you did to Guy. He's not the way you say he is, even if I haven't seen him in a year, I know that much." Her eyes shot green fire. "This I promise you, Mr. O'Brien, I'm going to scoop you every chance I get."

MIKE SHOOK his dark head sadly. Why was it, he wondered, that some of the really beautiful girls had to be so dumb? "Listen, honey," he said mildly, "hadn't you better start being realistic? You're too pretty to be going around with that chip on your shoulder." Nothing in her expression changed, she hated Mike and she didn't care who knew it. He began to lose patience. "If you're any kind of a newspaperman, Debby, which I doubt, you'd know you're being biased as well as all get out. You're nursing a stupid grudge about something that didn't happen. For weeks we all tried to cover up for that brother of yours, who's about as worthless as an empty whiskey bottle. I admire loyalty as much as the next man, but not when it's misplaced."

She glared at him. "Guy's a perfect dear," she said.

"Have it your way," he told her wearily. "And go right ahead and do your damndest to beat me out on a story."

Something in his tone made her flare again. "You don't think much of girl reporters, do you, Mr. O'Brien?"

"Sure I do—the good ones."

"I'm good," she said flatly. "You'll be hearing from me again, you can count on that."

"I hope so," he said sincerely, "because you and I could have a lot of fun fighting each other." He grinned.

"I can see why Guy detested you," she told him and walked to the door, her high heels clicking angrily.

He didn't try to keep her. She wasn't much of a reporter if she didn't have brains and understanding enough to know that you took the assignments your chief handed you. Guy Chandler was exactly as Mike had said, only worse. The *Leader's* managing editor had hired him as a favor to somebody or other, and had finally got rid of him when Guy botched stories and lay down on the job. Even a loyal and prejudiced step-sister ought to realize that no paper can keep a no-good incompetent reporter on the payroll.

It wouldn't take much for Mike to work up a real resentment at Debby, but he shrugged it off. He actually had read a few of her feature stories and had thought she wrote well and handled her subjects with a nice feeling of balance and drama. But she wouldn't get far here if she kept that chip on her shoulder.

HIS SIDEKICK at the office came slamming through the door. Jerry Danridge, crack photographer for the *Leader*, slid on the stool beside Mike and called to Al for coffee and pie.

He looked hard at Mike. "What's up?" he inquired. "Besides your blood pressure?"

"I didn't know it showed," Mike said. "It's a gorgeous redhead who hasn't got good sense." He explained all about it and Jerry listened attentively while he ate his slab of apple pie.

Jerry snorted when Mike finished. "She's got to put the blame on somebody. And she can't know Guy very well, or she'd know he was no good." He gulped coffee.

Mike said, "I don't like unreasonable girls."

"Well, see that you don't like this one." Jerry's eyes twinkled as he looked Mike over. "I can't see, though, why she wasn't impressed with that six-foot-one hulk of yours and homely face. Most girls sure are."

"Let's skip my love life." Mike

changed the subject. "We're off 'til Monday, want to go out to Aunt Louella's tomorrow? You remember me telling you about her? She's my great aunt, the widow of a sea captain and she lives in the sand dune section of Long Island." He finished his cake. "She's a little person given to lavender and old lace, as the saying goes, and she lives in a midget of a house."

"She always sounded like great stuff and I've wanted to meet her. But is there room for us both?" Jerry asked.

"Sure. I always pitch a tent in the back yard and sleep on a sand dune." Mike lit a cigarette. "Last summer I put on a roof for her and now my project is a new chimney. How are you with bricks, Jerry?"

"Terrible. Let's get going."

They left the cafe and picked up the second-hand car they owned jointly. After the air-cooled Fourth Estate the city heat hit them like a blast oven. The pavement oozed as they stepped on it and at any moment someone was sure to say "you could fry eggs on the sidewalk."

"Where does the redhead live?" Jerry asked.

Mike gave him a black look. "Now, how should I know that?" He drove in and out of traffic and at the first red light he said, "She'll never get anywhere in the newspaper business. A reporter's got to be open minded and reasonable."

"Not if she's beautiful enough she doesn't," Jerry scoffed. Then he sat straighter. "Hey, let's go find her. Let's try to get on her good side and win her over. That way you'll clip her wings and save a lot of trouble. And me, I'm a trouble-dodger." Mike laughed. Jerry loved trouble as much as he did, whether it was a roaring fist fight or an argument. "No kidding," Jerry persisted, "I could tell her a lot about her step-brother and make you out the hero type."

"Don't be such an ass," Mike said.

"Debby doesn't really know Guy, so she loves him. She'd hate anybody she thought had stepped on his toes. By the way, where did he go after he was fired?"

"I don't know." Jerry grinned. "Off with a bottle I'd guess."

THEY DROVE with the silence of good friends, then Mike turned off the Avenue into a side street with its row of old brick houses. He stopped at the middle one and murmured, "Home, sweet home again."

Inside their well worn apartment, with its hifi and TV and shabby comfortable furniture, they shucked off their coats and loosed their ties. On the walls were some of Jerry's award winning photographs and a few mezzo tints. When Mike went into the kitchen for a bottle of beer, Jerry followed.

"What's new on the McLane story?" he asked.

"Nothing," Mike said. "She's in hiding I guess." When the phone rang he picked it up. "Mike O'Brien here," he said.

"This is Debby Stewart," she answered crisply. "I'm more fair than you, Mr. O'Brien, I'm giving you warning. I'm going to break the McLane story."

"Wait!" Mike shouted and got a funny empty feeling in the pit of his stomach. "I'd like to talk to you. How about having dinner with me?"

"No, thank you," she couldn't have been more firm.

"We could talk about your brother." He dangled it out as bait, suddenly wanting to see Debby again.

She hesitated before she said scornfully, "You can't tell me anything about Guy. I wouldn't believe a single thing you said and I don't want to hear it anyway." The phone clicked sharply in his ear.

For a minute, Mike drummed his fingers on the table, then he turned to Jerry. "She's on the McLane story,"

he said dourly. "It wouldn't be so good for me if the *Graphic* scooped the *Leader*." He ran his fingers through his black hair. "And Debby just might get lucky."

All the presses in the city had headlined the news about the disappearance of Sybil McLane. Old Cyrus, her grandfather, was the steel magnate and a decent, fair minded man who was a great philanthropist. And Sybil was his only heir. There'd been a torrid love affair between her and an unsuitable man. After an exceptionally stormy session with old Cyrus, Sybil had left home. In six hours her grandfather had most of the United States hunting for her.

Mike, and the rest of the reporters, had learned that no marriage license had been taken out in Sybil's name and the man she loved was as mystified about her disappearance as anybody else. Though the New York police were working round the clock, they'd come up with no clue whatsoever to her whereabouts. They didn't suspect foul play, nor kidnapping since there'd been no ransom note.

Sybil Lane had simply vanished.

"It would be my luck to have Debby come up with something hot. And I haven't got the ghost of a lead," Mike said. "All I'm doing is going around in circles."

"Aw, let's forget it and concentrate on getting out of this hot box tomorrow and seeing auntie," Jerry said.

"Suits me," Mike agreed glumly. "And let's forget about unpredictable redheads too." He opened another bottle of beer to celebrate his doldrums. Forgetting Debby might be a little tough, but he could try. If it weren't for the McLane story he knew he could put her out of his mind with the greatest of ease. She wasn't his type, she was too stubborn and bad tempered. Yet, he had the terrible hunch that she'd turn up to be a thorn in his side...

Chapter 2



EARLY THE next morning, Mike and Jerry threw their bags in the car and started for great-aunt Louella's. At this hour the thruway that cut the island wasn't crowded with weekend

traffic and they made good time. They sang to the radio and Mike tried to forget the McLane story and Debby.

A few hours later they pulled up in the elm shaded main street of Hackers-town. Mike always stopped to load up the car with groceries for great-aunt Louella and today was no exception. He left Jerry and went down the street to the supermarket. Hackerstown was a typical summer resort town which woke up and came alive in the summer. There were a few smart shops, a stock company that played four nights a week and two dance places down the road a piece.

This morning there were tanned girls in shorts and bright ribbons in their hair in the market, along with chubby children and men in colorful sports shirts that hung outside their slacks. It was crowded, but Mike finally had his goods checked out and carried the cartons out to the car.

Jerry wasn't around, so he smoked a cigarette and watched the people walking along in the sun. They all seemed to be in a summer holiday mood and he looked for a familiar face. He knew most of the year round residents, who didn't mingle much with the summer people, accepting them, however, as a necessary asset or nuisance, depending on how you looked at it.

When Jerry came back to the car there was a wide grin on his face. "Guess what?" he said. "I found the redhead."

"You mean Debby?" Mike exploded.

"That's right. She was leaving the drugstore and I asked the clerk who she was."

"Well, don't just stand there," Mike ordered. "Get in and we'll try to find where she went and what she's doing way out here."

After Jerry slammed the car door he said smugly, "Don't hurry. I know where she went. She's visiting four girls who rented an old house down the road near the ocean."

"Well, aren't you the know-it-all," Mike said and wished his pulse would stop this crazy racing. Debby might have a hot lead to Sybil McLane's whereabouts, but like him, she was taking the weekend off. If he could find her he might persuade her to bury the hatchet until Monday morning and they could have some fun tonight and tomorrow. He thought he might like that very much indeed.

"It's too bad you have to build chimneys this weekend," Jerry said. "Otherwise you could spend the time removing that chip on Debby's shoulder you say she has."

"Don't be dumb," Mike growled. "I'm not interested in her." He flushed when Jerry snorted derisively.

THEY TURNED off the highway and onto a sandy road. The midget house was tucked close to the dunes that curved softly to the ocean front. Mike had built a wind break to protect the house, which the sand had drifted against. Now he looked with pardonable pride at the roof and parked in front of the white and blue trimmed narrow two storied house.

Great aunt Louella hurried out on the porch, her tiny rounded figure covered with a spick-and-span lavender dress. She kissed Mike thoroughly and was gracious and sweet welcoming Jerry, but she glanced behind her apprehensively.

Mike grinned. "Stop worrying, hon-

ey. We aren't going to clutter up your neat little bedrooms. Jerry likes a tent." They could see her relief as they carried the groceries into the small tidy kitchen.

Aunt Louella oh'd and ah'd at the special delicacies Mike had brought her. "I know, dear, you planned to build the chimney," she told him, "but with Jerry here, why don't you make this a holiday? Find some of your friends and have a happy hour."

Mike knew her well enough to know there wasn't any use arguing. "Can you bear the disappointment, Jerry?" He smiled.

"I'm not quite at my best with bricks," Jerry confessed. "But I'll be glad to try."

"Don't be ridiculous," Aunt Louella ordered sharply. "I don't want company huffing and hauling up on my roof."

After they cleaned up and had lunch, they left to see what excitement they could stir up. Driving along Jerry said, "Let's make the first stop Debby's. I might find myself a girl there too, since she's visiting some pretties."

For some unexplained reason Mike was suddenly self-conscious. "I don't know. There're some mighty nice town girls who are friendly."

"Look, Mike, if Debby really has a fat lead on Sybil McLane, you'll feel pretty foolish if you don't try to worm it out of her." He turned and looked at his friend. "What's the matter? Do you think she'll bite you?"

"No I don't think she'll bite me," Mike snapped. They stopped a potato truck so Jerry could describe the house and get directions to it. It wasn't hard to find since it loomed up in an uncared for yard about five miles along the road. With some uncertainty, Mike parked by the sagging porch.

Jerry jeered, "I can feel your cold feet from here," and hopped out of the car.

He banged on the door and when

nobody answered, he banged harder. The door was flung open by Debby. She looked sensational in white shorts and sweater and Mike couldn't help having his breath quicken.

She ignored Jerry and glared at Mike, who was climbing out from behind the wheel. "How dare you follow me, Mr. O'Brien?" she demanded and certainly didn't look friendly.

After he introduced Jerry, he stood looking down at her. "I'm taking a holiday this weekend the same as you are, Debby. Why can't we..."

"Bury the hatchet?" she asked derisively.

"How about me?" Jerry said. "I've got no hatchet. I'm the exciting, fun type." Her angry face warmed and softened a little, but Jerry shook his head sadly. "No, I guess that won't do. After all, Mike saw you first."

After thinking it over, her eyes held Mike's. "Will you promise not to hound my footsteps afterwards if I have a date with you?" She half smiled when Mike crossed his heart. "You said you'd tell me more about Guy and I guess I can manage to endure your company for that. You may be able to give me a lead where I can find him."

"Can you find me a date too, Debby?" Jerry asked.

She turned and called, "Meg," through the open door. A blonde ran downstairs and came out on the porch. "If you want a date with an exciting, fun type photographer he's available," Debby's voice was mocking.

Jerry and Meg frankly sized each other up. "He's cute," she finally decided and he winced.

THEY ARRANGED to pick up the girls at six-thirty for dinner and the strawhat theater. And Mike found himself humming as they drove off. One date wouldn't be the end of Debby and him, not if he had anything to say about it. She fascinated him and he had to know her better,

besides she might really have some hot information about Sybil. He wished he did. He didn't relish the idea of her scooping him.

They swam that afternoon and lay around in the sun getting tanned and Mike began to wonder if Debby would give him a date tomorrow too? It would help quite a lot if Guy Chandler weren't her step-brother. Not for a minute did Mike think she'd softened any toward him. She'd only agreed to go out with him tonight for the avowed purpose of pumping him about her brother. It wasn't much to cheer a man up.

At a little after six-thirty Debby was beside Mike in the car and Jerry and Meg were laughing their heads off in the back seat. Debby was as cool as the pale green dress she wore. He'd been right about why she'd accepted his invitation.

After a while he got her talking about Hollywood and her life there as he tooted along. It was she who brought up Guy's name.

"I was born in Los Angeles," she said. "I guess I always wanted to work on a newspaper. My father was on the *Los Angeles Daily* and it was in my blood." She smiled. "Guy is older than I and he was awfully good to me when I was a child, after my mother died." She turned so she could look at Mike. "Did you know he had an unhappy marriage?"

"No," Mike said. "I didn't know."

"The breakup hit him hard. He's never been the same since. He just didn't seem to care about things any more and he lost one job after another." She sounded sad.

"Then why do you blame me for his losing his job on the *Leader*?" Mike asked gently.

"I'm coming to that," she said tensely. "Guy finally got that job because of Dad, who thought a complete change of scenery would do him good. He hadn't had a drink in a year when he was hired in New York." Her eyes

were bleak. "I had letters from Guy and he always mentioned your name."

"My name?" Mike didn't try to hide his surprise. "Why me? I scarcely knew him."

"He said how nice you'd been when he first started on the paper. How you went out of your way to help him." She was silent then and Mike tried to think of how he'd been especially helpful and couldn't. He'd treated Guy exactly as he would any other new man who didn't quite know his way around. "Gradually Guy began to resent your success," she went on again and her voice was flat and without expression. "He said you always got the assignments he wanted most. And when you had him taken off the McLane story after nobody could find Sybil and it became big, that broke him up."

"You're all wrong," Mike protested. "Like I told you before, I had nothing to do with taking him off the McLane thing."

"I don't believe you." She was tense and she held her purse too tightly. "But please, where could Guy have gone?"

"I don't know, Debby. I'll ask the boys on the paper to keep an eye out for him and maybe one of them can turn him up." He glanced at her. "Can't we forget Guy for the rest of the evening? I mean we can't find him now." He felt a little bad tempered about her dragging Guy in almost before they'd had time to say hello. Or maybe it was because he knew she'd only agreed to come because of what he might tell her about her brother. Most girls would have at least pretended they were fairly pleased they'd come out with him.

MIKE STOPPED at a dingy looking eating place outside of Hackers-town. This was Amos Jordon's place and it had the best sea food in the world. It wasn't where the vacation crowd came because it wasn't all pret-

tied up. He noticed Debby eyeing it with some distaste and he smiled.

"Amos Jordon's a character," he explained. "He won't paint the place for fear strangers might be attracted to it and he hates summer people. I get in only because of my great aunt Louella, believe me."

"Mr. Jordon sounds a little weird in this day of hot competition," she said and got out of the car.

There were six long unfinished wooden tables and only three of them were filled with local people when they went in. Amos eyed the girls and Jerry suspiciously and Mike made quite a thing of the introductions.

"Well, sit," Amos said ungraciously. "I'll bring your food."

When they seated themselves Meg said, "Don't we get to order?"

"We take what Amos gives and we like it." Mike grinned. And like it they did. It was the finest lobster and french fried potatoes, the most delicious crunchy french bread and green salad any of them had ever tasted. The girls gasped when Amos replaced their plates with clean ones and set down another huge platter with more lobsters.

Meg and Jerry were in such high spirits that some of it spilled over on Debby and Mike and before they realized it they, too, were having a wonderful time. Debby sparkled and there was warmth in her green eyes that Mike loved. She was the most challenging, enchanting girl he'd ever met and she made him just a little afraid.

The good feeling continued through the comedy at the summer theater. It was when they were leaving after the last curtain that Jerry drew Mike aside.

"Meg and I are going to leave you two." He smiled. "She's going to take me to see some friends of hers and we'll catch a ride home."

Debby's face was expressionless when she discovered that she and Mike would be alone. When the other two

piled into one of Hackerstown's three taxicabs, Mike said, "Want to go dancing, Debby?"

Her mood had suddenly changed. "No," she said. "I'd like to go home." Though he protested, she remained firm. She didn't have that stubborn little chin for nothing, he thought wryly.

The moon was bright and shone on Debby's hair, splashing silver in the red. She was quiet riding back to the old house.

"What ideas have you about Sybil McLane," he asked more for something to say than because he hoped to get any information.

Debby sat straighter, mockery in her voice when she said, "I'd tell you, wouldn't I?" After a minute she went on, "I have no patience with Sybil. If I loved a man I wouldn't care if my grandfather didn't approve of him, or whether it would mean losing a fortune."

"You'd never run," Mike told her. "You're not the running kind." He smiled at her, but she was staring straight ahead at the road. "What I can't understand, Debby, is what she thinks she's solving by doing this vanishing act. You're a girl, a very beautiful one I might add, why do you think she's doing it? Did she leave to think things out alone? Or was she sick of fighting with old Cyrus?"

"Of course, she left to decide things alone, to find out if she loves her man enough."

He glanced at her sharply. "You sound very damn sure about it."

"I am." She looked amused. "As you said, I'm a girl."

THAT STRANGE, inexplicable sixth sense most crack newspapermen have, gave Mike a warning. Then he decided he was crazy. For a minute, though, he'd thought Debby might know where Sybil was and had listened to her reasons for her disappearance. He decided against it because

Debby was a newspaper girl, competent or not, and if she knew Sybil's whereabouts she could scoop the country and earn herself a great big byline. She couldn't afford to kill this story because of sweet womanly sympathy for a confused lovesick girl.

He looked at Debby again and maybe it was the way the moonlight shone in her eyes that gave them that glint of amusement. Mike wasn't quite sure.

When he walked her up on the sagging porch she didn't suggest that he come inside. "Well," she said, "we've had our date, Mr. O'Brien."

"And thank you for a wonderful time." Then he said suddenly, "How did you happen to come to Hackers-town?"

"You did, didn't you?" She laughed. "Lots of people do."

But she seemed too nonchalant about it and again he got that little warning. It seemed oddly coincidental, but then, again, many things were. Yet, it didn't feel right. Something about the whole situation bothered him, but he couldn't put his finger right on it to save his life. One thing, Debby hadn't followed him here, because she couldn't know about his great aunt Louella.

He sighed. She was devastatingly lovely and then he found himself doing the thing that came instinctively to him. He took Debby in his arms and kissed her. He tried hard, but he couldn't make her respond and it was like kissing a cold marble statue. It was insulting and frustrating and he wanted to shake her. When he let her go she glared at him.

"I never want to see you again." Her voice was choked with anger. "I didn't like you in the beginning. Now I simply detest you, Mr. O'Brien."

"You and Guy," he muttered and strode to his car. She slammed the front door as he drove away and he cursed himself for giving her the satisfaction of knowing how badly he wanted to kiss her.

At Aunt Louella's he noticed that the lights were on in one of the upstairs bedrooms and decided she'd changed her room since he was here last. She heard him getting his bag in the kitchen and came down to see if he were hungry. For some reason she seemed to want him to go on to bed and he realized he'd disturbed her rest.

Mike undressed in the tent and took a quick swim before bedding down. The moon made a path through the open flaps and he fell asleep to the steady rhythm of the ocean.

"Hey, wake up. Hey!" Jerry shook him and he slowly opened his eyes.

"Why can't you be quiet," he grumbled and yawned.

Jerry stuck a lighted cigarette in his mouth and raved about what a knockout Meg was. They'd danced, walked in the moonlight and had a wonderful time. He went on about her just the way he did every pretty girl he knew and Mike wished *he* could fall in and out of love as fast with as little worry.

"You know something?" Jerry said. "Meg only met Debby last night when she arrived for the weekend."

"So one of the other girls asked her." Mike stopped in the middle of another yawn. That old nagging feeling started bothering him again and he had the conviction that something was wrong somewhere. But he still couldn't sort it out.

Long after Jerry was snoring, Mike was still twisting and turning, so he got up and went outside to walk along the beach. Debby was a girl who could bother him enough without having her mixed up in the McLane story.

Then he noticed that the light was still on in Aunt Louella's bedroom and became alarmed. She might be ill and need help. He ran back to the house, let himself in the kitchen door and, at the foot of the narrow steep stairs he called her. There was no answer and in a minute he smiled. Aunt Louella must have fallen to sleep with the light on.

Feeling reassured, he went back to the tent and this time he slept.

Chapter 3



AUNT LOUELLA was bustling around the kitchen when Mike went in the next morning. She looked flustered when he kidded her about going to sleep with the light on.

"I've a headache, dear, so will you take Jerry out to dinner today?" Before he could answer, there was a thump over their heads and they looked at each other. "My gracious," she cried. "I guess I put that book too close to the table edge. I need new glasses."

Jerry came in and they started on the enormous breakfast of flapjacks and a man sized slice of ham. As usual on a Sunday, Mike drove Aunt Louella to church and Jerry went along.

It was after the services when they were talking to some of the congregation, that Mike saw Debby and almost jumped in surprise. She wore a picture hat and a dress with yellow roses splashed on it and she appeared almost too demure.

She came over to them and, ignoring Mike, spoke to his aunt. "Mrs. Conners," she said, "as Mike can tell you, I'm Debby Stewart. May I be forward and ask if you'd let me come to talk to you this afternoon? From what Mike's told me you know some wonderful sea stories."

Aunt Louella was so flattered she practically purred. But Mike eyed Debby with grave suspicion. He had never mentioned his aunt's fund of stories about the sea. That information she'd gotten from somewhere else and he wondered what she was up to. This would be well worth looking into and if she came this afternoon he'd be there.

"Come to tea, my dear," Aunt Louella urged. "At four-thirty."

"What about your headache?" Mike asked.

"It's gone." She acted as if she didn't like being reminded of it.

"Thank you so much and I'll be there at four-thirty." Debby's smile was warm and gracious. As she turned away, however, her glance at Mike was cold and uncompromising and he knew she hadn't forgiven him for kissing her last night.

When he got a chance he told Jerry, "Debby's up to something and I can't quite put my finger on it."

"She was sure smooth with Aunt Louella," he agreed.

To make matters worse, Aunt Louella was almost jittery at the prospect of Debby's coming for tea. It simply didn't make sense to Mike and he was worried.

Jerry had a swimming date with Meg and, feeling like a fifth wheel, Mike tagged along. When they got out to the old house to pick up Meg, Debby had gone out somewhere and that didn't do anything to lift Mike's spirits. Knowing he was contributing nothing to the gayety of the occasion, he wandered off alone and lay on the beach getting more of a tan.

It was nearly four when they dressed and Jerry suggested that Mike drop Meg and him off at her house and take the car.

"You've got it bad, huh?" Meg smiled. "But I'm scared Debby doesn't like you so very much."

"She doesn't like me at all," he said.

"Don't you care," Meg told him kindly. "I know plenty of girls who'd go right overboard for you Mike."

"Thanks." He smiled and wished it made him feel better.

BACK AT the house he found that Debby wasn't there yet and breathed easier. There wasn't any doubt but what she wanted something and he intended to be around to find

out what. The tea tray was set with fine old silver and fragile china. Somewhere along the line Aunt Louella had found time to make a cake and paper-thin water cress and cucumber sandwiches. She must have expected him because the tray was set up for three.

"Land sakes, what's a *man* doing at my tea party?" she grumbled.

"I like tea." He grinned.

"What you like is a girl as pretty as Debby."

He wandered in the parlor. He loved the room with its stuffed birds and antimacassars, with the marble topped table and mantle filled with objects the Captain had brought home from the seven seas. It was only on rare occasions that his aunt opened up the parlor and doing so today signified the impression Debby had made on her.

She was tapping her heels over his head as she must be flying around to change into another lavender dress and, then, he thought he heard her talking. Mike frowned, worried. It wasn't like her to talk to herself.

After a minute, he picked out a tune with one finger on the old organ. One of the town's three taxies squealed to a stop in front of the house just as his aunt came down the stairs.

After she'd welcomed Debby graciously she said, "I did not invite my grand-nephew, but here he is anyway."

"So I see," Debby said. She smiled at Aunt Louella so sweetly that Mike's heart took several high dives.

It was wonderful how happy she was making his aunt. Listening to her ask questions, he was a little ashamed that he hadn't given Aunt Louella this pleasure oftener by talking about the old days.

Mike had just returned from filling the hot water pitcher when Debby said, "The Captain must have known my grandfather. He was sailing to China then." He eyed her skeptically, but she carefully avoided glancing in his direction. "I tell you, Mrs. Con-

ners, that generation really *did* things, look, for instance, at Cyrus McLane."

Mike sat down hard on the horse hair sofa. "Let's look at him," he said.

"We knew Cyrus well." Aunt Louella spoke as if Mike weren't there. "He belonged to the same whist club my husband, the Captain, did. Cyrus was allowed to join because his father had made money in the China trade too. My gracious, it's a real tiny world."

"You never told me that about McLane," Mike said accusingly.

"You never asked me," she answered back with spirit.

"You knew Sybil McLane had disappeared?" Mike asked.

"Naturally. I read it in the *Leader*." She smiled at Debby. "Next time I'll read your paper too, my dear."

After that Debby thanked her for a wonderful tea party and got up to go. She stopped at the bottom of the stairs and ran her fingers along the railing. "Your home is lovely. May I see the rest of it?"

"Some other day I'll be delighted to show it off to you." Aunt Louella was proud and Mike thought it had been a gracious thing for Debby to have asked. Certainly it gave the old lady pleasure.

She and Aunt Louella kissed cheeks good-bye and he knew Debby had made a tremendously favorable impression.

"May I drive you home?" he asked her and she unhappily agreed. In the car he said, "How about a swim and dinner?"

"No, thank you, Mr. O'Brien," she said coolly and they drove in silence the rest of the way.

"I won't kiss you again," he finally blurted.

"No," she agreed, "you won't."

Oh, what the hell, he thought. There was no denying that Debby had gotten under his skin and if he weren't careful she'd crawl into his heart and stay there forever. And the last thing Mike

wanted was to be trapped by this red-head!

THERE WERE two cars parked in the weed-grown yard and when Mike stopped the car he turned and looked at Debby. "Since you've had tea at my great-aunt's, the least you can do is ask me in."

"She's simply marvelous," Debby said warmly and there was no mistaking her emphasis on the pronoun. Her eyes met his steadily. "You were impossible last night and I don't want any more of it. Besides, I have to get back to New York. Good-bye, Mr. O'Brien."

He watched her start to the house and wondered if he'd ever see her again. "Wait," he called. "Want a lift back to the city?"

"No thanks."

Meg came running out of the house and handed Debby a telegram. She tore it open and Mike watched the relief flood into her face. "It's from my father," she called to him. "Guy's back in Los Angeles and he's all right."

"I'm glad." Mike felt a lot of relief too. At least they wouldn't have to fight about Guy if he ever saw Debby again.

"Come on in, Mike," Meg invited and when he refused, because of Debby's attitude, she wailed, "I'm desolate that you and Jerry are leaving tonight. What will Debby and I do tomorrow without you?"

Debby's face turned scarlet and she dashed into the house. He was very thoughtful as he turned his car toward his aunt's. She'd certainly wanted him to think she was going back to the city this evening. And he wondered if it was because she disliked him so much she didn't want him in the same town, or if there was another reason. Right then he decided he wasn't going anywhere until he found out. Debby was too devious to suit him.

Great-aunt Louella was puttering with her potted herbs that lined the

kitchen window sills. "That Debby's a smart girl, smart as I was at her age," she said and nodded her head emphatically. "Why don't you marry her, Mike?"

He gulped. When the shock wore off he managed to laugh. "She wouldn't have me, honey, for the number one reason."

"But you're in love with her, son. It sticks out all over you like a sore thumb."

He allowed himself to think about it for the first time. From the moment he'd seen her in the Fourth Estate Cafe, he'd been more interested in Debby than in any other girl he'd ever known. It would account for the incredible way his heart had been acting when he saw her, and why he couldn't help kissing her. Now he admitted he was staying tonight not only because he was afraid Debby might beat him to Sybil McLane, but because he wanted to be where she was.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I guess I am. And she despises me, she said so."

"Pooh!" Aunt Louella sniffed. "Where's your fighting spirit?"

"Only a fool fights a losing game," he told her and turned to walk toward the ocean.

DOWN BEYOND the rolling dunes there was a family picnic and Mike went in the other direction. He walked aimlessly, kicking at the sand as he thought about his newly discovered love and the utter hopelessness of it. It had taken a long time for Mike to fall seriously in love and it had to be with a girl who practically hated him.

He turned away from the ocean and sat down on one of the many high sand mounds. He lit a cigarette and heard a noise on the other side of the mound. Mike looked and caught his breath sharply. "You!" he exclaimed.

Sitting there was Debby, her hair flaming in the late afternoon sun. She jumped to her feet. "You're spying on me," she blazed.



There had been a torrid affair between Sybil and an unsuitable man.

"Just what are you doing on my beach?" he demanded.

"Watching the sunset, if it's any of your business."

"Ho, ho, the sunset. You're up to something and I want to know what it is. And I want to know why you fibbed about going to New York tonight?" He hoped none of his love for her shone through.

"You want to know too much, Mr. O'Brien." She picked up her pocket-book and started away from him, but he caught up and turned her around to face him.

"You know something about Sybil McLane," he said quietly. "What is it, Debby?"

For a minute she looked thoughtful. "I'm not sure. But you know just as much as I do about her."

Beyond that Debby wouldn't say a

thing and Mike knew it was useless to try and get any more out of her.

"Will you kindly take your hand off my arm?" she asked coldly and when he did, she headed for the beach. He let her go.

It was funny she'd be way out here. Unless—an idea staggered him. He ran after her, half stumbling in the sand. "Debby," he said and tried to keep the excitement out of his voice. "Did you come down here on the off-chance that I might be along?"

"Oh, no." She laughed with genuine amusement. "I wasn't looking for you."

Mike turned on his heel and made his way back to the tent where he sat brooding until Jerry came. "What's wrong with you?" Jerry asked. "Boy, you look like somebody stole your little red wagon."

"I'm thinking," Mike informed him with dignity. "I'm going to stay here tonight."

Jerry considered it too, but decided he better be at the *Leader* bright and early in the morning. After all, being only a photographer he didn't have a big story as an excuse.

"You keep the car and I'll grab a bus in," he told Mike. "You'll need it to chase off after Debby." He smiled and started throwing things into his bag. "You know something? You got yourself trapped by that redhead."

"Oh, stop," Mike said disgustedly.

AUNT LOUELLA wanted to go to the movies, so they dropped Jerry at the bus station and went on to see a picture Mike had seen before. It was nice in the dark, though, and he could think about Debby and wonder what in the hell she was up to.

On the way home a front tire went flat and Mike discovered there wasn't a jack in the car. Aunt Louella told him there was an old one in her shed and he left her and caught a ride on the truck. For some reason she seemed nervous about waiting for him.

After Mike got the jack, he went to the kitchen for a drink of water. Above him there was a loud thump and he raced up the stairs to investigate. It came from the room right over the kitchen and the door was closed.

Suddenly Mike was exultant. Things clicked into place. Everything. It had been here right under his nose and he'd been too stupid to catch on. Debby had most of it right, otherwise she wouldn't have been out on the dunes watching the house. Somewhere in the city she'd gotten the list of Cyrus McLane's friends, any one of whom Sybil might have run to for council and a place to rest, and who could be better than great-aunt Louella? Mentally, he saluted Debby, she was really as smart as his aunt had said.

"Sybil?" he called softly and the slender, black haired girl opened the door.

"All right." She smiled faintly. "You're Mike and I guess I'm ready to go back now. I'm going to marry the man I love."

"Good for you." Mike grinned at her.

There was a noise down in the hall and Debby came racing up the stairs. "Sybil's mine," she cried. "I would have had her yesterday if your aunt had shown me the house. Then she plunged down again for the phone with Mike right after her.

"Be reasonable, Debby," he said and now he had the fighting spirit to win her in spite of her dislike. "You're going to end up married to me and raise a lot of redheaded boys, so it's not quite as important for you to turn this story in first." She looked at him searchingly. "Jerry said I was trapped by a redhead and, darling, I want it to be for life."

Then she smiled. "You know, I like that story. I suppose I fell half in love with you from what Guy used to write me," she said. "I like the fabulous headlines we'll make together." Her eyes were shining. "Go phone your editor first. Then come back and we'll see what we can do about a kiss when we both cooperate. And hurry, Mr. O'Brien dear."

And Mr. O'Brien did just that before he and Debby went to rescue great-aunt Louella.

A Tempestuous, Romantic Tale

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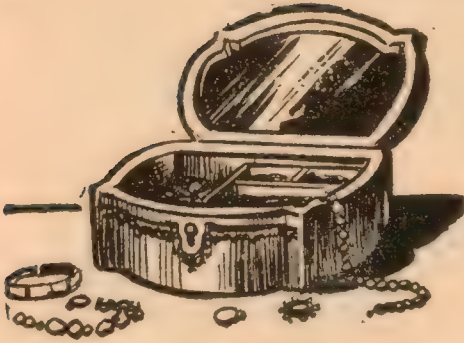
There may be two or three girls in the "crowd" who feel just the way you do, when there's pressure to play along.

Follow The Crowd?

IN THIS world, somebody is always trying to tell us what to do. There are a lot of laws that we must follow—or else. If we try to drive over the legal speed limit, go through a red light, or forget our registration card, then we have an appointment with a man on the bench. The family physician warns us about

eating too much, and going at too fast a pace. Ignore him and the scales tell us a sad story. Or we may have to take out a month from work and just rest.

And then there is the tough task of keeping up with the Jones. They get a new car, so our family must get one; their daughter gets a new coat, so that



starts an unpleasant discussion in our family. And if you happen to live in a small town, then keeping up with the Jones can be a very expensive proposition.

The powers that control the female styles must stay awake every night figuring out new fashions—especially designed so that, to be in style, you must buy and wear something you haven't. Is there a female who doesn't want to wear the latest? Maybe there are some who even work out their own fashion ideas, and then try to get the rest of the "crowd" to follow.

There is something fundamental about wanting to be one of a crowd, and so we have a variety of clubs and sororities. But when you consider the female of the species, you find two conflicting and opposing tendencies. Sure, a girl does want to be one of the group; but, being a female, she also wants to be a little different and display what best can be termed her individuality. Ever see the following happen at a dance: In comes one girl with a beautiful dress. She is the center of attraction. Why? Because she is a bit different. She is being admired by the men and either envied or hated by the females. Then in comes another girl with the duplicate dress. The two look at each other with daggers in their eyes. One may later insinuate that the other dress is merely a cheap copy of the expensive original.

THE TROUBLE with being one of the crowd, is that you must follow the actions and pace, or else you can't be one of them! That may be tough on you if there is only one crowd in your community. If they like to stay out late at night, and your dad wants you home early, then family friction may result. If they drink heavily, and you either don't want to or can't take the stuff, then you become a back number. If they go in for heavy petting and you object, then they call you a "wet blanket" or "old fashioned."

It is remarkable what a collection of names they have for you if you refuse to follow along with the crowd. Your partner will tell you that you are a "Bum sport" to ruin this evening. Or that you are a "kill-joy"—the kind of a girl who never can have a good time, and who likes to ruin things for everyone else. It is remarkable how many eager people want to show you how to live. "Today is here, so drink deeply of it—for who knows what the morrow brings?" is a line that has been handed girls in many different ways.

And yet there is something very strange about the action of the crowd—for there are at least two or three girls who feel exactly the way you do. They can't make sense out of all the actions, and wish they could discuss it with others who feel the same way.

Often the "leaders" of the crowd talk big about having excitement, thrills, and a good time. They like to think of themselves as daring.

HILDA WAS the daughter of a big game hunter and she had what was probably the perfect answer—especially when somebody suggested doing something real exciting.

"Show me anything more exciting and dangerous than hunting lions, armed only with spears, and I'll do it.

We are returning to Africa next year. Come with us when Dad and I go on our next hunting expedition. You can be our guest."

And she wasn't kidding at that! Before you do all the things a crowd does, try a little thinking and contemplation off by yourself. Sit down in a comfortable chair and ask yourself a couple of questions such as these: Do they really enjoy the things they are doing? Are they trying to run away from something? If I do what they do, just where will it end? Are they the kind of people I might want to associate with a few years from now? Am I going to meet the kind of fellow who wants to put a wedding band on my finger? And if I do what they do, will they talk about me behind my back? Will there be anything of which I can be ashamed of, so that I want to conceal it in the future?

Once you get the answers to those

questions, then you can decide whether or not you want to follow *that* crowd. It may be that, with a little searching, you will find an entirely different crowd—even in a small town. Or perhaps some in that one crowd may break away and be with you.

This is the kind of problem that every girl faces. For you do want to go with the right crowd because your objective is to meet the right fellow.

Does the right fellow travel along with the wrong crowd? You answer that one. It isn't too difficult to find happiness and contentment if all of us just use the common sense we are supposed to have. And that common sense is a good map provider, because it shows us the safe and sound road along which we really want to travel. That's the road on which we meet the right people, for the right crowd.



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REAL WESTERN STORIES



*a
Trifle
Too
Smart*

by
Ruth
Lommatzsch

She'd never be Jim's boss!

TO BE JIM McDONALD'S boss, Darlene Conrad knew, was one thing. To be in love with him, she was finding out, was still another; and having him regard her as sort of a human robot, didn't make it any easier. But at least she wasn't just a perishable fixture in the office of Barge-Neuman's Spring Division, she defended herself, since she had worked her way up, even though it was her Uncle Mel who owned the factory. Either she would have to force herself to give up this silly infatuation for this over-sized, good-looking, young beast—and settle down to being a successful business woman, or—or. And the or—is what usually got her.

As Darlene's slender fingers reached for the pen on her desk, Jim walked through the door. She rested the blunt edge of the pen against her chin, a tiny, slim elbow providing the prop. When he reached the desk, she lowered her pen and as usual appeared calm and collected.

"The reports all ready, Jim?" she asked lightly. "You're right on time."

"Have to be." He laughed. "I'd get behind with my work if I didn't." Darlene fumed at the way he could be so courteous without knowing that she was alive. As he picked up the new orders and studied them, she tried again.

"How are things going down on the line, Jim?" she asked. "Everything running smoothly?"

"Fine! Fine!" Jim answered, without looking up from his facts and figures. "We're breaking in a new girl in the testing department. I think she'll work out okay, too. Annette is a fine worker." Giving a final glance to the copy sheet, he folded them neatly and stuffed them into his coverall pocket. "Well, that's about it, Miss Conrad," he said. "I'll do my best to get this out as soon as possible." With that he was off, and as Darlene knew, she was well out of his mind by the time he reached the end of the first hall...

Seeing Jim from day to day, striding through the office on his way to the factory, his steps firm and determined, with all the confidence of a man who knew his job and could take care of it, made her wish they could have more in common. And that wish was almost ten years old.

At twenty-one, Darlene hadn't minded the brush-offs, he'd change when they knew each other better. But trying to impress Jim was like trying to melt a stone wall, and all her efforts only advanced her own position, until she now had an enviable gold-lettered executive's name-plate on her desk.

Miss Conrad! Always Miss Conrad! Couldn't he see that she was first of all, just a woman, and only her uncle's niece? Need a job create such a barrier and always loom so formidable between them? For a foreman of clear thinking calibre, Jim McDonald sure couldn't see beyond his nose.

Darlene pushed back her chair, her tiny insteps stretching out to reach the floor. She walked across the room to open a window, and stared down at the parking lot. Men and women were still making their way to the front door, laughing and joking. In about fifteen minutes everyone would be on the job, and only the steady hum of machinery would break the silence. These people were actually happy. They seemed to have something to live for.

"I guess I'd better use my cool, calculating business head for something besides business," Darlene muttered. "Jim and I are about as close as one extreme is to another."

She turned to the steel files and let a drawer glide to its full length. As she fingered the accounts, she selected a few that might lend themselves to a nice lengthy discussion. Tucking a pencil between a few brown curls, she went back to her desk and thought it over. Then she called Jim on the phone.

WHEN HE came to the office, she asked him to sit down, then business-like, came right to the point. "Uncle Mel has been mentioning a few of these accounts lately," Darlene stated. "I thought we might discuss them a bit."

Jim looked the first one over. "Your uncle is familiar with this one, Miss Conrad. I doubt whether we could do much on this score. It might be well to place it in the hands of an agency."

"And this?" Darlene continued.

"I'd give these a chance. They are fairly new accounts, and personal contacts may mean a lot." Jim considered. "At least, I think it would be worth a try, Miss Conrad."

"Thank you, Jim. Oh, by the way, before you go; I've been planning a little get-together for the force at my home. I thought it would be fun to share something besides work for a change. Will you pass the word around for me, Jim? A week from tonight, around eight?"

"Sure thing, Miss Conrad. I'll post a bulletin and they'll all know in short order."

Darlene watched him leave. The futility of it floored her.

"I don't suppose any of them will dare not to come," she mused. "They might offend the head executive, seeing as how she's the boss' niece, and I suppose that would never do!"

She turned sharply to replace the files and slammed the drawer shut.

"Anything," she decided, "would be far better than this!"

Slipping into her red topper, and going hatless, Darlene walked until she found a quiet little restaurant. Here she chose a cozy corner seat, took an hour and a half for lunch, and settled for three cups of coffee.

Jim would surely come to the party, and he couldn't ignore her all evening. It would be an opportunity. And if he'd see her in something really feminine for a change, it might help. Just suits and blouses year in and year out

weren't exactly outstanding. Why, he might even break down, and use her first name.

Selecting a dress for the evening was more fun than she thought possible, and putting the finishing touches to the table of refreshments that evening made her feel lighthearted and gay.

Uncle Mel was the first to arrive, his paunchy, good-natured face creased with smiles, and he had a kiss for his favorite niece.

"Oh, Uncle Mel, I'm so glad you could come. But wait, there's the bell."

It was Jim—with Annette Fulton.

"Come in." Darlene whispered hoarsely, struggling to keep her poise, since etiquette demanded that she be well composed. But watching Jim courteously remove the wrap from Annette's dark, slim shoulders, and seeing the lovely corsage pinned to her fuchsia gown, almost unnerved her.

It helped to have Uncle Mel there. He supplied the conversation until Darlene trusted herself to speak again.

"I'm so glad you could come." She tried, cordially. "You have never seen my home, have you, Jim? I'd like to show you my hobby, before the other guests arrive. Would you care to?"

"Why, yes, Miss Conrad. I'd find it very interesting. Wouldn't you, too, Annette?" Jim answered. "Just lead us to it."

Darlene showed them her collection of plants. "They're not just ordinary plants," she explained. "I try to grow the odd ones. This is an African Violet vine. It will grow three feet long and have flame colored flowers—I hope. This sprout is from Florida. It is one of the oddest native plants. And this—" But the doorbell rang and Darlene excused herself to answer it.

She could hardly leave her guests standing at the door, unattended, and she could not break away to rejoin Jim and Annette as quickly as she had hoped. It seemed ages before they made their way back into the living room.

"Your plants are very unusual, Miss Conrad." Jim assured her. "We enjoyed them immensely, didn't we, Annette?"

Having Annette agree, made it just so charming. Darlene hated herself for not having the situation well in hand, and her head spun dizzily as she tried to devise little ways to maneuver Jim's time to suit her own.

SHE MEANT to ask him to help her with the card tables, but before she could manage it, Jim was sitting beside Annette on the piano bench, and Uncle Mel, seeing her dilemma, pitched in and did it for her.

The most she could hope for now, Darlene figured, would be to have a few refreshments with him. But between playing hostess, and being politely regarded as the boss' niece, the opportunity did not present itself. Inwardly she grimaced as she watched Jim pour Annette's coffee and keep her plate well filled. Seeing Jim so attentive to the other girl for a full evening was almost more than Darlene could bear.

"I'd give anything," she thought feverishly. "If I could just at least be on the same level as he is. At least I'd rate something besides 'Miss Conrad!'"

Thoroughly miserable, she was glad when the last guest had gone, and even Uncle Mel was no longer in sight.

But a day or two later Darlene appeared in the factory wearing blue jeans, with her hair caught up in a net. Jim greeted her with an amused smile.

"Don't laugh, Jim." Darlene pleaded. "I really mean business. I want to tour the place with you so I know how everything is going. That is," she continued. "If you don't mind."

"Oh, no. Not at all, Miss Conrad. If a tour is what you have in mind, why, then, a tour is what you shall have. Now this," he pointed out, "Is a heat-treating furnace. This is where

we temper the steel. You see, the trays are lifted—”

“Oh, I know that, Jim. This isn’t the first time I’ve been here in the factory, you know. Let’s go further. I want to see how the work is going. If it is as efficient as it should be.”

“Oh,” Jim answered flatly. “Well, come along then.” He led her through the plant, stopping here and there to her satisfaction. Heads turned to look at her as they passed. But she didn’t mind. She was in Jim’s atmosphere, happier than she’d ever been up there in the office.

“Well, that’s about it, Miss Conrad. If it passes your inspection, I’d like to get back to my work.”

“Just one more thing, Jim.” Darlene stalled. “I’d like to read that gauge. I used to do it for my Uncle when I was a little girl.” As she spoke she jumped nimbly onto an oil drum. “If I weren’t such a shorty,” she continued. “I wouldn’t have to jump up here. I’d just read it the way you do.” She stretched forward and up for a better look.

“Look out, you little goof!” Jim growled. He lunged forward to catch her, or to grab the lid, or at least do something—but it was too late. Darlene was already dunked in a slippery, shiny mess of drained oil. She looked at Jim, and saw that he had received his share of it, too.

“Oh-oh!” she wailed. “Jim!”

“I should just let you stand in there, you silly goose! Who ever heard of cavorting around on an oil drum? You could have really hurt yourself, do you know that? Talk about a nitwit, you sure take the cake!” Jim’s face was livid with anger. Then he realized his position. “I’m sorry, Miss Conrad,” he said. “But you do sort of get carried away at times.”

“Just get me out of here,” she begged, repentantly. “I’ll never get myself cleaned up again. I feel like a slippery, slimy old eel. Ugh!”

Jim helped her climb out, looked at

his own grimy coveralls, and then called Annette to give Darlene a hand with her clothes. Annette supplied a pair of old jeans and a sweater, and Darlene made her way to the wash room. Here she cleaned up the best she could and decided to call it a day.

AT HOME she relaxed in a tub of warm water, bath crystals and perfumed soap. She shampooed her head thoroughly, and then once more for good luck. Thinking of Jim was far more painful than the ordeal. She had lost his respect, and with it, she knew, went the one slim chance of winning his love.

Once again at the office, Darlene decided never again to invade Jim’s domain, and when he came in to pick up the orders, she laughingly told him so. She remarked that he also looked well scrubbed.

“You’d be safer to take up some sport,” Jim chided her. “At least it would be much healthier.”

“Sport, Jim? What kind of a sport?” Darlene asked, hoping to redeem herself.

“Oh, golf—swimming—anything like that. It would be far more relaxing than bathing in oil, don’t you think?” Jim grinned. “I sort of favor golf myself. Great sport. Often play at the Groenmere Country Club. Annette’s pretty good at it, too.”

Darlene bit her tongue. She wanted to say, “Annette is pretty good at everything, it seems to me.” But she let it go at that, and twisted the thought of a sport in her mind. Of course, it would be golf. It would just have to be golf.

“Jim,” Darlene said a moment later, “what would you think of a company golf tournament? Companies often have activities for the employees and I think we should promote something like that here, too, at Barge-Neuman’s. It could be an annual event, Jim. Something to look forward to. With a dinner, perhaps, or some

kind of an entertainment afterwards. How does the idea strike you?"

"Swell! Boy, that would be tops!" Jim answered. "It would promote good will among the employees. A great idea, Miss Conrad! It could turn out to be a lot of fun." It was the first time Darlene had ever struck the right note. She caught his enthusiasm and tried to picture herself deftly swinging a golf club.

"Would you help, Jim, to get things going? I don't know the first thing about golf, but I can learn." And her voice had the ring of sincerity.

"Sure, I'd help," Jim replied, "It wouldn't be hard to arrange for it. We'd plan a suitable day, and make arrangements at a course in advance. We could play at Groenmere, if you like. I'm well acquainted there."

"Okay, Jim. That does it. I am hereby appointing you chairman of the golf committee. Do whatever you think is necessary and let me know what I can do to help. Okay?" Darlene wrote on her memo pad to pick up a book on golf, so she'd at least know one club from another. If Jim was as conscientious at his sport as he was at his work, it would take a bit of doing.

PLANS FOR the tournament went off in fine order, and even the weather cooperated. It was a sunny, moderately cool day, and playing eighteen holes of golf proved to be an invigorating game for all of them.

Darlene limped along to the club house, and joined the other girls to freshen up for the banquet. It was the first time she had really mingled with them, and the experience was rewarding. She found that they were not just part of the machinery they operated, after all.

But Darlene was due to spend another miserable evening. She did not rate one moment alone with Jim. Annette was his constant companion. Darlene begged off early, and did not

stay for the entertainment, but went home to nurse an aching heart.

When Uncle Mel stopped by the next day, he remarked, "Darlene, you're missing quite a bit of time at the office these days, I notice."

He was kindness personified, and Darlene could see that he was really concerned.

"I know, Uncle Mel. I just can't help it. It's Jim," she groaned.

"Jim! What the dickens has Jim got to do with it?"

"Everything, the big goof! I had to go and fall in love with him. And he can't see me for dust."

"Well, for Pete's sake!" Uncle Mel exclaimed. "You certainly don't need Jim! A girl with your position, your looks and your brains? Hah! You sure don't need a guy like Jim."

"I know, Uncle Mel. But I guess it's not that easy." She put an affectionate arm around her uncle's shoulders, as she sat on the arm of his chair. "What good is my position, my good looks and my brains? I love Jim. I'd give it all up for him, if it would help."

"Foolishness, child! He takes my little girl the way she is or not at all!"

"Uncle Mel—" and Darlene looked every bit his little girl in that moment. "Will you lease a driving range for me so that I can learn to be a better golfer than Annette Fulton? I think I'd have a chance then, Uncle Mel. We've got to have something in common. This way he thinks I'm just someone to boss him around."

"But a driving range! What idiotic nonsense is that?" Uncle Mel wanted to know. Darlene remembered that anything too energetic had its drawbacks for Uncle Mel. Carrying his weight, was for him, a real effort, but pushing it around would be sheer torture.

She laughed. "Please, Uncle Mel, please! You could change everything for me." She twisted the few strands of hair that were left on his head, and ended by biting his ear. "If we could

lease a driving range, then Jim could teach me to play golf, and I'd be an expert golfer in no time. Then we'd spend more time together and— Oh, Uncle Mel, you can't refuse me this."

"Got it all planned out, eh? Well—I don't suppose it would do any harm. Happy golfing!"

Inducing Jim to be her golf teacher was not as hard as Darlene had expected. He seemed to enjoy the evenings they spent together out on the range. Darlene hoped it was her company, and not merely the set of clubs. She was determined to be as good at golf as she was at being a full-time business executive.

"Darlene," Jim said one evening. "You're trying too hard at it. Relax. Relax a bit and it will go easier. Now grip the club like I showed you before—" He took the club from her, prepared to go into a lengthy speech.

But Darlene heard no more. "Let's go have a cup of coffee, Jim. It's beginning to get dark anyway."

Jim complied, and she hoped to hear him slip once more, but it was not realized. "Good night, Miss Conrad," he said finally. "I'll see you at work tomorrow."

IT WAS JUST as if the spell was broken with those words. The golf lessons discontinued without warning or an explanation, and work became the usual humdrum affair.

Darlene was puzzled. Until she heard the rumors of the engagement. Jim and Annette Fulton were engaged to be married!

The bottom dropped out of everything then. Losing Jim would be like mutilating her whole life. She couldn't go on without Jim!

Pride kept her from asking him if it was the truth. But when the rumors persisted, and with Jim dropping the golf lessons, Darlene thought there could be no other answer. And she went back to impressing him with her super intelligence.

She threw herself into her work, determined this time to show him that she could forget. Going all out for efficiency, Darlene began to look for flaws in various departments. Where expenses could be cut, and production could be on the upgrade.

Approaching Jim in the factory one day, she carried a notebook on figures and a few new ideas. She explained them in detail, with the added influence that she thought her Uncle would back them up whole-heartedly.

"I think if this were carried out," she summed it up neatly. "It would be to the great benefit of a faster output, Jim. Things have been running a little slow lately, don't you think?"

She hoped that by now he wouldn't visualize her in the oil drum, and a little out of her element.

"Slow, or not slow, Miss Conrad," Jim stated stiffly, "we are doing it the safest way. You must realize that." Darlene had the impression that he might be struggling to keep his temper, as he shoved his hands in his pockets, gritted his teeth, and stepped back a foot or two. Firmly convinced her ideas concerning production were of the utmost importance, she persisted in showing him where his department could be improved. Calmly disregarding the warning signals, she was not fully prepared for the inevitable blow-up.

"Okay, Miss Conrad! You get the job! If you can do it better, go ahead! You don't need a foreman around here any longer. Besides, I'm tired of taking your lip day in and day out. Anyone with the super wits that you've got should be able to run the whole factory. So more power to you. I'm just plain fed up!"

"Why, Jim!" Darlene said, astounded. "What's getting into you? You know I'm only interested in the factory. I have to take care of my job."

"Yeh, you sure do!" Jim declared, giving her a glance that left her drenched with a cold sweat. "All I

want to know is, just how smart can a woman get?"

Jim turned on his heel and left her standing there. She felt as awkward as she had the day Annette helped her peel off the oil-soaked jeans.

BACK IN the office Darlene tried to take the sting out of her heart. "Just how smart can a woman get?" The words echoed and re-echoed, then left a void, an emptiness, a dull hollow ache that would not be thwarted.

Darlene realized then that in some ways she had been downright stupid. All these years she had tried to impress him, tried to make him see that she was different than the ordinary run of the mill. But she had only succeeded in overshooting her mark.

"If I lose Jim," she whispered in her handkerchief, "it will be my own fault. I've been driving him away from me. Dominating. That's all it amounts to. And he had to take it because I'm the boss and the owner's niece to boot. What a set up! Oh, Jim, I'd do anything if I could be just plain people, like you."

As usual, Uncle Mel had a good firm, willing shoulder to cry on. That evening she called him and asked him to come over.

"Uncle Mel, you've got to do something for me," she pleaded, as soon as the greetings were over. "I've been so downright stupid, and it's all my fault, too. I've got to straighten things out with Jim, Uncle Mel. He's downright angry with me."

"Hmm-m. Jim again." Uncle Mel pondered. "What does this Jim McDonald have that you can't see in somebody else?"

"Oh, everything, Uncle Mel. Just everything. Jim is different. He's smart, Uncle Mel. You just can't imagine how smart he is. Why, he could run the whole factory blindfolded. I just know he could."

"Hold on. Nobody is that good. And

it isn't what I mean anyway. I meant to say—"

"Uncle Mel, have you ever thought of putting Jim in a higher position, say, as head supervisor, over the entire works? He could do it, Uncle Mel. And it would be about the smartest move you've ever made in all your life. Why, things would really be humming in no time. It has been slowing up, you know." Darlene searched for the lost strand, and found it.

"No, I didn't know," exclaimed Uncle Mel, feeling a little under pressure. "I'm under the impression that everything is normal and running smoothly. That is just the way I like it, young lady."

"Oh, but that means we're standing still, Uncle Mel. Not to go forward means to go backward. We can't have that. I have the factories deepest interest at heart. You know that. Look how I've worked all these years. But Jim—Jim could do so much if you'd give him the chance. And the salary he should get wouldn't be too much either. He'd earn every penny of it." Darlene slowed up just long enough for Uncle Mel to get a word in edgewise.

"Just what do you think Jim could do that isn't being done now, Darlene?" Uncle Mel asked, showing his determination that he was not going to be impressed.

"Why, with Jim as the head supervisor, he'd organize things a little differently. He'd cut corners, move production, do things the modern way. You could create a job like that, Uncle Mel. Head supervisor of the entire factory. Now—well, we're just stymied. Please, Uncle Mel. Together Jim and I could work out a good many new ideas. And they'd pay off, too." She stopped twisting his hair with the intentions of putting a few figures down on paper, but thought the better of it.

"Oh, together. So, with the factory's deepest interest at heart—"

But Darlene interrupted. "Please,

Uncle Mel. It's my only chance, and you have to admit it is the most sensible idea I've ever had in my life. We need someone as capable as Jim to handle a job like that, and the little extra cost is really just an investment. It'll pay off in no time." She bit his ear playfully, knowing her Uncle Mel never could resist the advances of his one and only sister's daughter.

"Your ideas, young woman, are costing me a young fortune. I think you have something with Jim being the head supervisor. He'd be worth his weight in gold. It would free me from some of the responsibility, too. I will agree to consider it. But you must realize I haven't money to toss around for every little whim. First driving ranges—and now this."

Darlene laughed. "Oh, Uncle Mel. The driving range. Of course, I wouldn't want you to keep that now. We haven't used it lately, anyway. And with the money you'd save—"

"Oh, no you don't. This is the last brainstorm I'm going to sponsor, Jim or no Jim. I'm not as young as I used to be, you know." But his gruffness couldn't hide his affection for Darlene.

SHE WAS happier than she could imagine. And Uncle Mel was as good as his word. Jim was soon taking on the full responsibility as Head Supervisor. He was, in every sense of the word, Darlene's equal in the business field.

But Annette Fulton was still the fly in the ointment. Darlene had no way of knowing if Jim were really interested in her, since she would not stoop to ask. But still anxious to squelch the engagement rumors, she approached Jim one day.

"Well, Mr. Big Shot. I'd like to suggest a few business conferences soon, if I may, and if you're not angry any more."

Jim laughed. "You may," he said. "And I'm not angry any more."

"How about discussing them at Groenmere? I can think better in the

sunshine and I'd like to see if I'm any kind of a match for you. I've been practicing lately."

"Sure thing. But if we keep on doing this on your Uncle's time, we'll both be out of a job."

It was a glorious afternoon, under a clear blue sky. Jim's drives were straight and sure. Darlene's little pot shots somehow got there, too. After putting on the third green, Darlene knew she'd never be a match for Jim in many ways.

"Jim," she said, feeling as though a confession were in order. "Can you ever forgive a big lummo? I'm sorry for the way I've been acting. I guess I just didn't realize what I was doing. I'd hate to feel that we couldn't be friends. Now that you and Annette are engaged to be married—"

"Engaged to be married? Who said so?" He stopped to look at her, still holding a club in mid-air.

"Rumors. I wish you the best of luck, Jim. Both in your new position and with Annette."

Jim dropped the set of clubs. Quiz-zically he studied Darlene. Then he threw back his head and laughed so all the countryside could hear him. But he didn't care. "Annette! I'm not going to marry Annette! We're good friends, that's all. I've got my little girl all picked out. If I can ever reach her. She's always been miles too far over my head."

Hearing Jim laugh was a bit embarrassing, but the kiss he gave her then was beyond recording.

"Jim," Darlene reminded him. "We're here on business, remember?"

"Are we, Darlene?" he grinned and led her to the bench beside the next tee off. "Then let's start a few engagement rumors of our own and really give them something to talk about."

Darlene knew that she could never be Jim McDonald's boss again. And she'd no longer be a human robot. But out here, under the blue sky, and with Jim at her side, she felt it was well worth the sacrifice.

Trigonometry

by Cleoral
Lovell



I was *never* very good
As a mathematician
But honestly I wish I could
Prove this proposition:

When I direct a beam of love
Toward the moon on high,
You can see the moon above
In the same blue sky;

Is there any chance you might,
By triangulation,
Catch reflected shafts of light
Bright with my adoration?

She Played With Fire

by Rhoda Temple

She wanted Bill ... but what hope was there for her?



Even yesterday, Erica had known this was to be a one-way street, leading to heartbreak!

THE SKY was cloudless and the water as blue as only the Pacific ocean can be blue. Erica shivered with excitement when she dropped her terry cloth robe on the sand and slipped out of her red sandals. She tucked her dark hair into a white cap and looked once more at the diving float three hundred feet beyond. He was there all right and alone!

There was only a sprinkling of bathers on the beach because this was Wednesday and the crowd never came the middle of the week. For ten days Erica

had planned what she was going to do. Now she waded in and dove through a roller, praying that her trick would work.

Erica loved to swim and she headed toward the float with long easy strokes. Halfway there she stopped and treaded water.

"Help!" she screamed. "I'm drowning!" She let her head submerge and took time to resurface. "Help!" she screamed again and waved her arms wildly.

At her first call the tall bronzed man

had dived cleanly off the bobbing float and was cutting through the water to her. She grabbed him and hung on, struggling as she continued to yell.

The next thing Erica knew she was clipped neatly on the chin and came to lying on the float. She looked up into troubled blue eyes.

"Don't worry," he said gently. "You're feeling fine now."

She sat up. "I am," she asked and rubbed her jaw gingerly. "Then why do I ache?"

He took cigarettes and matches out of the waterproof pocket of his trunks. "I guess I should have let you drown," he said and smiled. "It would have taught you not to try to swim beyond your strength."

"Wouldn't that be a little severe?" She bristled, then got up to stand at the edge of the float. "I could drown on my way back to oblige you."

"Wait," he protested. "You can't go now you need rest."

"I do?" she said and instantly sat down and tangled her toes in the water that lapped at the float. Her heart was racing crazily. "I do feel weak like you said."

"Look, Miss—"

"Erica Fane," she told him quickly. "I live at 1521 Magnolia Street with my cousin. I'm a car hop at the High Hat Drive In. Since you've saved my life, shouldn't I know who you are?" As if she didn't already know. As if she hadn't been simply dying to meet him and had finally had to resort to this.

"Bill Jenner," he said and squinted at the sun as if he could read time that way. "I'm running late and I think we'd better get ashore."

"You run along," she told him airily. "I wouldn't think of detaining you."

He looked from her to the shore and back again. "I *have* to see you back safely." He scowled. "Don't be difficult, Erica. Come on, I'll swim you in."

SHE STOOD up and hoped she looked as if the water were scaring her silly. "Oh, I'm afraid," she cried and threw herself headlong at him. Involuntarily he put his arms around her slim figure. It was wonderful until she stopped dreaming and realized she could be a stick for all he cared. All she was to Bill was a terrorized girl who couldn't swim very well.

He dropped his arms from around her and looked startled. Then she stood on tiptoe and kissed him, her lips lingering on his. "That's thanks for saving my life, Bill," she said softly and slid into the water.

About half way to shore she decided she better keep up the deception that she was a poor swimmer, otherwise he'd end up hating her for her act. She pretended to tire and let herself go under once. Instantly Bill was there beside her helping her in to the beach and talking soothingly. Finally they reached the sand and she lay in a tired limp heap.

For a minute he stood looking down at her, his lean face puzzled. Then, without a word, he turned and headed up the beach toward the parking lot.

Erica watched him go. Her disappointment at this abrupt ending was deep. There wasn't anything she could do about it right now, so she picked up her robe, stuck her feet into the red sandals and jerked off her bathing cap, shaking her dark hair until it lay in a mass of tangled curls.

It had been quite an experience to have kissed Bill Jennings. And though he never expected to see her again, Erica had other plans. Walking to the bath house to change to take the bus home, she remembered again when she'd first seen him.

He'd pulled into the High Hat in a dilapidated car and she'd taken his hamburger and coffee order. She'd liked his looks and his impersonal smile, so she'd lingered after she'd hooked the tray over the car window.

"Catsup?" she'd asked hopefully,

ready to run her legs off to get him what he wanted.

"No thanks." He smiled. "Just fine."

There wasn't any reason to keep lingering by his side and Erica had turned away when Eddie, a steady customer, had driven up and called, "Hi, Bill." Bill got out of his car to go talk to Eddie and she saw he was taller than she'd thought, with broader shoulders.

THE NEXT night Eddie stopped again and she'd asked him who his friend was. Eddie had teased her about falling for the big lug, but he'd told her the name was Bill Jennings. He was an electrician working at Acme Appliance Company and he was a bachelor.

Since Erica's day off fell in the middle of the week, she'd grabbed up all her courage and called Bill at the shop, not sure what on earth she'd say when he answered. He was at the beach a girl's crisp voice informed her and Erica had gone looking for him. Her luck was surely in, she felt, because anybody can accidentally bump into a man on the beach.

She was too late. After she'd changed into a white abbreviated swim suit, she found Bill was just leaving. He was surrounded by a crowd of boys with bats and baseballs, waiting to see him drive off. "Next week same time," they shouted. "Next week," he called back and grinned. If he even noticed Erica he gave no indication.

Today, though, she'd arrived earlier and caught Bill before the boys could descend upon him. Now she could see them tossing balls back and forth and shouting at the top of their lungs. Excitement swooped through her. She must have made some impression on Bill because he'd forgotten to play ball! That ought to mean something, though it probably meant he'd wasted so much time with her he didn't have any left.

Riding home on the bus Erica's conscience hurt her some. But she assured herself that a man sometimes had to be poked to notice a girl. Still in all hon-

esty, she was forced to admit that she was trying to push herself on Bill with marriage in mind. Playing with fire like this could get her badly burned. It could so easily end up in heartbreak if she weren't his type of girl. Then her chin lifted. Bill had to care for her, he just *had* to.

At the small red tiled stucco house, Erica headed for the kitchen and made herself a ham sandwich. After she poured a glass of milk she took them out to the tiny patio and curled up in a battered deck chair to eat lunch and think. Maybe when Cousin Carrie came home from the telephone company where she was supervisor, she'd have some good ideas for Erica's campaign. Carrie was an old dear with a strong conviction that men were putty in a clever woman's hands. That was because Cousin Carrie had once been engaged to a weakling and put all men in that category.

When Carrie came Erica's words poured out in a torrent. Her cousin listened carefully to her account of the day and her eyes softened. "It looks to me," she said judiciously, "like you've finally gone and fallen feet first in love at last." She'd smiled a little grimly. "But you can't tell me any man's as wonderful as all that. No sir." Carrie giggled. "Eat your supper, then we'll go to the movies."

NEXT DAY at work every time a car stopped at the Drive In Erica's heart leaped up in her throat. But Bill didn't come. It wasn't that she actually expected him, she told herself, but it was a little humiliating to have to admit that her kiss had been a lot less than effective. Then suddenly her nervousness and impatience turned into indignation. After all she had put on a terrific drowning act for him and kissed him and everything to show her interest. Any other man she knew would have come zooming over here to see her, any other man but Bill. Grumpily, she finished her shift and walked home.

Casually, Erica noticed a small delivery truck in front of her house as she turned the corner of Magnolia. She paid little attention to it, concentrating as she was on her anger and hurt at Bill's lack of response. There was a weed in the border of the zinnias that she pulled before she walked around to the kitchen.

The cellar door was open and she hesitated before she called, "Hello down there. What's going on?"

A muffled voice said, "I've just fixed it, Ma'am."

Erica caught her breath. She ran to the front room and looked out the window at the lettering on the truck. ACME APPLIANCE COMPANY it said. Bill was down in her cellar! This was some of Carrie's shenanigans.

Going down the steps Erica almost stumbled in her eagerness. He was standing near the fuse box playing a big flashlight on some wiring. He snapped it off and even in the dim cellar light she could see he was exasperated. When he gathered up his tools, he made an effort to keep control of his temper.

"Those wires were deliberately pulled loose," he said accusingly.

"Well don't look at me," she retorted. "I don't play with wires."

He started up the stairs and she ran after him. In the kitchen he turned to look at her and she saw the disbelief running over his face. "It's you!" he said.

She nodded happily. "Didn't you remember I lived here?"

"No," he said. "Look, Erica, you're liable to electrocute yourself if you fool around with wiring."

"But I didn't, I tell you. You, you think I did it so I could see you again?" she sputtered angrily. "I had nothing whatsoever to do with getting you here, and aren't you being pretty darn conceited?"

Bill didn't bother to become angry at her accusation, he merely shrugged. "If you'll sign here please," he said

stiffly. He shoved a piece of paper at her.

AUTOMATICALLY she signed. "Look," she said triumphantly. "The call slip was made out to my cousin." Bill looked frankly nonplussed and his smile twisted ruefully. It was some satisfaction to her to see some of the wind go out of his sails. "Why," she demanded and prayed her voice kept cool, "would I want to see you again? I admit you saved my life, but I thanked you. That ended it." Her heart seemed to be jumping up in her throat and she tried her best to keep it hidden.

"I didn't mean to presume so much, Erica, honestly. I guess I got a little mixed up because I found somebody had been messing with the electricity." When she showed no signs of relenting he said, "If you'll have supper with me on the beach tonight we can talk it over. Believe me, the last thing I am is conceited."

"Well," she said slowly.

"Please," he begged and reluctantly she agreed. This was her second great performance, because the hardest thing she'd ever done was act indifferent about the date. And, gracious, how she did love cousin Carrie!

AT SIX-THIRTY that evening Erica was waiting in the living room, peeking through the wide picture window when Bill drove up. Her instinct was to rush out of the house to meet him, but she had sense enough to know she must not be so eager. She made him ring the doorbell twice before she answered.

"Hello," she said indifferently.

"Hi." His smile was warm.

Driving to the beach where the restaurants dotted the highway, she and Bill kept talking at once, then apologized and letting the other one go ahead. They talked about lots of things like weather and how good the hamburgers were at the High Hat. When



And then ... she didn't care how much tomorrow night hurt. He was here now — she was in his arms...

she asked how long he'd lived in town he told her he was from Iowa, but after his Army stint he'd settled here and someday he hoped to own his own electrical shop. Then she related some of the amusing things that happened to her at work. By the time they stopped at the big neon lit restaurant, she felt Bill was beginning to really like her a lot. It was wonderful.

Then it stopped being wonderful. Inside they met Eddie with a blonde named Amy Prichard, who eyed Erica with some surprise. The first thing she asked was where Erica had met Bill.

"I was swimming and he saved my life," Erica said and smiled at him.

"Oh, no!" Amy laughed. "Not that. Why, it's the oldest trick in the book. I've tried it myself, haven't I, honey?" She looked sidelong at Eddie.

"Sure." He grinned. "Anything to make me notice you and fall in love." He patted her hand and winked at Erica.

"Why don't we all eat together?" Amy said. Since Bill didn't protest, Erica couldn't, though she knew it was

curiosity that had made Amy suggest breaking in on their date. It made her boil a little that Amy could be so deliberate and Bill not even notice.

After they ordered Erica said sweetly, "Tell me more, Amy. What else did you do to win Eddie?"

This time Amy's eyes weren't amused as she studied Erica. "I don't think you need to be told anything. Why don't you practice on Bill? He's sworn he won't fall in love until he has his own electrical shop, but he could tell you whether your tactics would work on a more susceptible male." It was all said goodhumoredly, but Erica could feel Amy's claws.

Bill laughed and so did Eddie, who plainly thought Amy was a great wit. Bill said, "I wouldn't be any judge of another man, I'm afraid. Amy's right, I haven't had time for serious consideration of matrimony." He laughed again.

"Have you any serious thoughts about marriage, Erica?" Amy asked.

Erica could feel the hot color rise in her face. "I haven't met the right

man yet, because *that* man must find the time to want it, too." Everybody laughed as though she'd made a big joke, then Eddie started talking about fishing.

SOMEHOW Erica managed to keep up her share of the talk, not letting it show that she knew she'd lost Bill before she'd even had a chance with him. It was strange how she'd known by just seeing him once that he was the man she'd always wanted. It was as if fate had brought them together over a hamburger. Yet even yesterday she'd known it might be a one way street leading to heartbreak and if Bill were as determined as all this, he wouldn't open his heart a tiny crack to let love pour in or out.

If her kissing him on the float hadn't made the slightest impression, then she had no chance at all. She'd played with fire, one of her own lighting, because Bill had done nothing to keep that fire kindled. The only reason she was here now was because he'd been unfair about the electric wires and, being a gentleman, had wanted to make up for it. If she'd been old and gray he still would have asked her.

Once she caught the mockery in Amy's eyes, but it didn't even make her bristle. Perhaps she ought to thank Amy for setting her straight about Bill so she wouldn't go on dreaming and hoping.

After they finished dinner, Amy and Eddie said good-bye because they were going for a ride in the moonlight. They giggled a little and Erica felt as if an arrow had pierced her heart. It didn't do a bit of good to remind herself that she didn't really know Bill, not when her heart called it a lie.

In his car, he talked happily about three masted schooners and how someday he was going to take a long vacation on one. Suddenly Erica couldn't stand it.

"I couldn't be more sorry," she said contritely, "but I have a bad headache.

I think I better go on home, Bill."

He couldn't have been sweeter. She was thankful she'd given herself an excuse to close her eyes so he couldn't see the tears that brimmed in them.

When they reached her house, he sat there for a minute before helping her out. "I'm afraid," he said quietly, "that you've had a dull evening."

"Don't be silly," she told him. "And it's been nice knowing you, Bill. Lots of good luck." She got out and ran up the path before she burst into tears. She wished she'd never seen Amy, so she could go on dreaming.

TO PROVE he wasn't in the least interested in her, Bill didn't phone or come to the Drive In. Carrie insisted that it was Erica's fault; Bill was just as weak as the next man and he'd gotten scared and gone into hiding. But Carrie didn't know Bill.

On her day off, Erica found herself at the beach. She'd swim out to the float and lie in the sun remembering the day she'd met Bill and how she'd kissed him. And if her tears mixed with salt water nobody would ever know.

She'd dropped her robe and sandals when she started out to the float. Her breath caught and she could feel her heart flutter. Bill was out there on the high diving platform and jackknived into the water. She watched his beautiful Australian crawl toward the shore. When he stepped out of the water near her he looked startled himself.

"Well, hello," he said pleasantly. "What brings you here?"

Suddenly Erica was angry. "I wasn't chasing you, if that's what you mean," she snapped at him. "It's a public beach." She picked up her robe and thrust her toes into the sandals. "I'll leave all the sand to you." She stalked off toward the bathhouse, praying he'd follow, yet scared silly he might.

Bill didn't. She turned and saw him plunge into the water and head back out to the float. She couldn't help but stand there watching.

Then halfway out he thrashed around and waved an arm. "Help!" he called. "Help!"

In an instant Erica was in the water swimming fast, not stopping to think of anything except that Bill needed her. When she reached his side she saw that his face was contorted with pain.

"I caught a leg cramp," he said.

"Put your hand on my shoulder, Bill," she told him calmly. "Try to relax. I'll get you to the float, it's closer." He didn't argue and she swam strongly. In a few minutes they drew themselves out of the water up onto the bobbing boards.

"Whew!" He let out a long breath. "Thanks." He dug cigarettes and matches out of the waterproof pocket in his trunks. "I phoned you half an hour ago," he said. "I've been down in San Diego on a job."

"Oh!" Something was thundering in her ears.

"I wanted to see you because I didn't want you angry at me." He moved closer and took her hand. "Thanks again for saving my life." She glanced

at him sharply, but his face looked innocent enough. He seemed very little concerned about his leg cramp now. "When Eddie and Amy had dinner with us I realized how much I'm missing, Erica. I thought maybe I could find a girl who'd wait one more month, by then I'll have enough money saved up for my own shop.

"It'll be a struggle at first." Her eyes met his and clung. "When you saved me just now, I kind of thought I might have found my girl."

"Oh, Bill," she whispered and his arms were around her.

Much later he said, "It's funny, isn't it? I save you and you save me. I guess we're meant to spend our lives together."

"Darling, I'm sure we are." Erica buried her face against his shoulder, almost unable to believe her happiness.

One thing, she'd never tell him she'd faked that drowning to try and catch his interest. Then her eyes widened and slowly filled with laughter. Why, my goodness, she'd never know if he'd just done the same thing to her!

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Love Me Not

by Betty Dale

Love me not for any grace,
Or the pleasance of my face;
If you love me, let it be,
Simply that your love is me.

Love me not for any wealth,
For position or for health;
If you want my heart from me,
Ask alone, fidelity.



Jealousy Flares At Catakwa

Novelette

by Ellen Darrow

Kay didn't recognize love
when it struck her.

KAY HARLOW could no more stop playing Cupid for her many girl friends than she could stop looking like an exciting package of blonde dynamite. Why anyone as beautiful as Kay would want to spend all her spare time cooking up blind dates for other, less fortunate girls was more than either the girls or the men she chose for them could understand.

But Kay would explain it with a careless shake of her shoulder-length hair and a laugh. "I'm in love. And it's such a grand and glorious sensation I want all my friends to feel the same."

Kay's mother had left her enough money to put her through college, but not enough to see her past the summer vacations with any kind of comfort. That's why she was so glad to get the job as swimming counsellor at Camp Catakwa.

"You're too good looking," the matron told her grimly.

Kay's smile broke out. "I can swim well, too."

"Well...don't let me catch you making eyes at Handy, or we'll never get another lick of work out of him. It's hard enough to keep a handyman, without the added attraction of beautiful blonde counsellors." But she hadn't fired the girl on the spot, so Kay wasn't worried.

She couldn't imagine herself falling for anyone, anyhow. Not when she was already head over heels in love with Paul Roberts.

Paul had mousy brown hair that wouldn't stay combed; and a complexion so ruddy that he always looked like he was blushing; and he was homely as mud; but he had the shyest, sweetest smile.

When he'd look at Kay, sort of puzzled and wistful, and ask, "What on earth does a dazzling doll like you see in a homely mug like me?" she would ruffle his hair into even worse disorder and tease, "Maybe it's that heart of gold you keep hidden there under

your uniform. Or the way your smile wrinkles up your whole face from your jaw to your temples! That fascinates me!"

Honestly, though, Kay simply believed in love the way very small children believe in Santa Claus. To her, it would spoil it to analyze your reasons, for loving someone. . . . She was that way about Paul and that was that.

It was the simplicity and directness about Kay that helped make her as well liked by girls as by men, in spite of the fact that she could have walked off with most of their boy friends without half trying, and they knew it.

LATE AFTERNOON found Kay on the archery field. The gay, bright red shorts set off her well-shaped brown legs to advantage. But she wasn't thinking of that as she selected an arrow, fitted it in the bow and took her stance, her moccasined feet well apart, her left arm and shoulder toward the target.

Gracefully and easily she raised the bow, pulling the bowstring back near her right cheek and fixing her eyes on a spot a little below the bull's-eye. She was ready to release the arrow when a strong masculine voice yelled:

"Hey, there! Wait a second till I get out of your way, will you?"

Kay shifted her glance to encompass the man in slacks who had just rounded the bales of straw on which her target was fastened. A smile tucked her generous mouth up at the corners as she resumed her stance and let fly the arrow.

It was not a perfect bull's-eye, but close to it, for the arrow zinged neatly into the first ring around the black disc.

"I asked you to wait!" the man exclaimed crossly.

"Why? I wasn't shooting at you."

"My sister wasn't shooting at the cow out in our west pasture, either. At least she didn't think she was. But it

was old Flossy who caught the arrow in her left shoulder. I've been suspicious of female archers ever since."

Kay's blue eyes twinkled merrily. "You don't look like a cow; and I am a better archer than your sister, so what are you worrying about?"

She looked him over appreciatively. He was frightfully good looking, she realized, taking in his tall, lanky frame with its well proportioned shoulders, waist and hips; his dark brown hair with just enough wave above the left temple to look neat without being theatrical or sissy. His jaw line was firm enough to denote stubbornness, but his mouth showed warmth and affection.

It was his eyes, though, that startled Kay. They were neither gray nor brown, but a mottled mixture of both, with little golden points of light that seemed to look right through you. It was warm on the archery field, but Kay felt an excited shiver run over her.

"I didn't know until this minute," he observed slowly, "but I think I'm worried about you. Tell me, is your name Cupid? And is there an arrow in your quiver that's meant for my heart?" A warm smile lighted up his face, and made Kay decide she'd only imagined those points of flame in his eyes. Reflection of the setting sun, no doubt.

"If this is a pick-up gag, at least it's a new version," she laughed. "My name is Kay Harlow, and I'm a counsellor at Camp Catakwa."

"And a darned efficient bow and arrow artist, if I do hate to admit it," he supplemented. "I'm Pat Murdock, dairy farmer from across the way." He waved one arm toward a row of modern cow barns a half mile distant.

"Then aren't you supposed to be feeding the cows, or milking them or something, this time of day?"

"I'm on my way home now. I hope you won't tell anyone, but I've been stealing a swim in your private lake,

down a little way from the camper's beach, so I wouldn't be spotted and arrested for trespassing—I hoped."

"It isn't my lake," she disclaimed with a shrug, "and you don't look like you'd contaminate it much, so I'll obligingly forget to report you."

"Swell! Will you go still further and meet me there for a swim tomorrow afternoon? There's the nicest little cove near the lower end of the lake..."

"Oh, a busman's holiday?" she retorted. "I teach swimming."

"But you do like to swim?" he persisted.

"Love it," she assented.

"What time is the teaching period over?"

"Three o'clock."

"Meet you in the cove at three-fifteen. You won't even have to change, you know. You'll be all dressed for it."

"But you..." she asked hesitantly, and was annoyed to find herself blushing.

He grinned. "I practically live in my swim trunks. All I have to do is shed my slacks and shirt."

"Oh, a drip," Kay teased. "I read somewhere that's the way the derogatory term got started. The poor people who bathe at Coney Island wear their bathing suits under their clothes and then drip all over the roller coaster seats, and other amusement rides."

He didn't seem to know whether he should feel insulted or not. "I usually dry out in the sun before I put on my trousers," he said. "I know I'm only a farmer, but I'll try not to be too much of a drip—"

"I was only ribbing you. Can't you take a joke?"

"Sure. Only I was a little disappointed when you mentioned Coney Island. You see, I like you. And I'd sort of hoped you were not a city girl. I don't care for city girls, usually—especially those from New York."

"I'm not from New York City," she confessed, "but it wouldn't matter, be-

cause I am the most thoroughly engaged person you ever met. However, I will take a swim with you, if you don't mind my bringing another girl along."

SHE WAS already thinking of Clarice Lane, who had been complaining last night, over a coke in the Casino: "I'm getting fed up, Kay. It's been so long since I had a date, I doubt if I'd know how to act. And now with my dad in Buenos Aires, I'm completely lost."

"You hear from Tommy every week, don't you?" Kay had asked.

"Yeah. Why should I sit around and get wrinkles in my face moping over him?"

"Are you and Tommy engaged?" her friend inquired, looking down at the small, twinkling stone on her third finger.

A queer look had come into Clarice's eyes as she replied stiffly, "No, Kay. We're not engaged. I don't believe in long engagements."

But Kay thought she could feel the hurt behind those words. She was almost sure that it was not Clarice's fault if she and Tommy were not engaged. It must be because Tommy had never asked her. No wonder she was blue. Kay knew how she would feel under similar circumstances...

She looked at Pat Murdock, and was positive he would prove an adequate distraction for Clarice—help her get her mind off her heartbreak over Tommy.

His brow was creased in a heavy frown. "Just my luck," he grumbled. "Well, an engagement isn't as bad as if you were married. And if the only way I can see you again is with a chaperone, drag her along. But right now I gotta date with a herd of cows. So long, Cupid."

Kay echoed, "So long, Cowhand," and cheerfully resumed her target practice.

Chapter 2

THAT NIGHT when the youngsters had been put to bed and taps were sounded, Kay found Clarice sitting on the steps of the rec' hall. Clarice had beautiful auburn hair, green eyes, and a milky complexion without a sign of a freckle. Her mouth was cute, too, when it wasn't pouting; but right now it was pouting—as usual.

She greeted her friend and confidante with a sulky whimper: "If Paul can get down from camp this weekend, I don't see why Tommy can't."

Kay slipped her arm around Clarice's shoulders and consoled, "I've got news. I met the most exciting man this afternoon—"

Clarice's eyebrows lifted. "At this forlorn outpost?" she asked, incredulously.

"The same. I was over doing some archery practice, when out he popped from the back of the target and started yelling at me. He swims at that little cove down on the lower end of the lake every afternoon. He wants me to meet him there tomorrow at three-fifteen."

Clarice lost interest. "So what? Some hill-billy farmer, no doubt."

"He's a farmer, all right; but he's definitely not a hill-billy. I told him I was engaged, but I'd bring along a girl friend—and I had you in mind, remembering how blue you were. It won't hurt you to go along and meet him, and I'm telling you, I think you'll like him. He's your type, Clarice; and maybe Pat will take you to the dance at Shady Pines Saturday night. If Paul comes we'd make a nice foursome."

"All right," Clarice conceded casually. "I'll go along and meet your Romeo—but I'm warning you, I won't like him."

But she did like him; Kay was sure of that the moment she introduced Pat to Clarice. Those strange yellow lights

came into Pat's eyes the moment he saw the glamorous redhead, and he almost ignored Kay from then on.

She swam away from them, on the pretext of letting them get better acquainted. But actually, she was surprised to find herself a little annoyed. While she enjoyed the role of playing cupid for her girl friends, it was somewhat unflattering to be completely ignored by a man who had seemed so much interested in you less than twenty-four hours ago.

She tried to tell herself it suited her perfectly, fitted right in with her plans. Still, it was a little nauseating to watch her friend coyly pretending she didn't know a thing about swimming—just so Pat would take the trouble to teach her—and have the excuse to support her slender body with his strong arms, while he explained the various motions to her.

Kay was floating on her back a few yards away. Finally she closed her eyes to shut out the sight of Pat demonstrating the simplest of strokes to Clarice.

She looked around when she felt a spray of water on her cheeks, and there was Pat standing in water up to his arm-pits and laughing down at her; his mouth not six inches away from her mouth.

"Wake up, Sleeping Beauty," he ordered gaily. "The swimming lesson is over. Come on in and lie on the beach and dry out with us."

"No thanks," Kay said stiffly. "You run along. I'm having a fine time out here all by myself. Or I was, until you showed up."

There was a puzzled frown on Pat's face. "I don't get it," he said thoughtfully. "It was your idea to bring your girl friend along and throw her at me. And now you act almost as though you feel slighted—or jealous!"

"Don't be silly!" Kay snapped, her cheeks reddening. "All I want is to be left alone. Can't you take a hint?"

He took it all right and strode back

to the shore so fast he left a furrow of water in his wake.

KAY TRIED to resume her day-dreaming; to think of Paul and how glad she would be to see him Saturday night. But it was no good. Instead, she found herself wondering why Clarice and Pat were instantly so much interested in one another. She could see them lying on the sand, now; Pat propped up on one elbow, his face intent as he stared down at Clarice and talked earnestly to her.

And Clarice, on her part, seemed to be completely enthralled, hanging on his every word. What could a dairy farmer say that would be of so much interest to Clarice? Giddy-headed, boy-crazy Clarice, who usually thought of nothing else but clothes and dances and having a good time.

Kay was conscious of the fact that she was being unreasonable. This was what she had wanted, wasn't it? For Clarice to find some diversion to take her mind off Tommy and her troubles. Why had she introduced her to Pat, if she didn't want them to like one another? She tried to tell herself it was because she knew so little about Pat, and whether or not he was worthy of her friend and would hand her some kind of line which would leave her with a worse heartbreak than Tommy had given her.

But convincing as the reasoning sounded, it did not relieve the gnawing feeling in her own heart. If only Paul were here, she thought wistfully, trying to conjure up his homely, charming face. Then everything would be swell.

She decided suddenly she would go back to her cabin, get dressed and write a nice letter to Paul, urging him to be sure and get his furlough for this weekend and to spend it at Shady Pines, the adult camp across the lake from Catakwa. That way, she could be with him every minute that she didn't have to teach the Catakwa campers to swim.

She paused to tell Clarice shortly, "I'm going on back to the camp, Clarice. You'd better come along soon. If you're late for supper there might be some talk." She was conscious of the fact that her voice sounded like that of the matron.

Clarice and Pat looked up, unconcerned, as though only slightly disturbed at having been interrupted. It was Pat who said: "What's your hurry, Cupid? Don't run away mad, will you?"

"No. Of course not. Why should I be mad? I'm just going on ahead so I'll have time to write a letter to my fiancee."

"Swell," he said. "Be seeing you."

Not if I see you first, she thought. He's overbearing and impossible. I don't know why I imagined he was attractive.

It didn't make her feel any better when Clarice came home all starry-eyed and raving about what a wonderful time she had had, what good company Pat was, and what fun they were going to have at the dance Saturday night.

"Gee, I don't know how I can ever thank you enough for finding him for me," she told her friend, giving her an exuberant hug.

Kay shrugged her off and said crossly, "I don't think Paul and I will go to that dance after all. They're kind of a bore. And when you haven't seen your one-and-only for so long, you're bound to have a lot of talking to catch up on."

Clarice observed carelessly, "I can't imagine what you and Paul have in common to talk about with him an ex-prize-fighter, and you a junior at college."

"You don't have to have a formal education to be bright," Kay said defensively. "I suppose your hick-farmer friend is a graduate of Harvard."

"No. But he is a University graduate, nevertheless. He went through the

Agricultural department of Coburn. Just finished, term before last."

"You learned a lot about him this afternoon, didn't you?"

"I certainly did—and he's grand! He wants me to meet his mother and his sister. His father died last year and left the place heavily mortgaged, but Pat has already got it almost cleared up."

"I'm going down to mail my letter. See you at supper," Kay told her friend, and hurried away from her before she would have time to ask any more questions that might prove embarrassing.

Chapter 3

SATURDAY afternoon Kay and Clarice were down at the bus terminal to meet Paul. Both of them stared, open-mouthed, when they saw it was not Paul who alighted from the Greyhound Bus, but Tommy.

"Surprised, darlin'?" he cried gayly, catching Clarice in his arms and swinging her around. "It was old Tommy who got leave after all. And since Paul got mixed up in a brawl and landed in the guard house, I copped his bus ticket." He kissed the surprised girl squarely on the mouth and looked over her head at Kay.

She swallowed hard and managed to ask, "Paul—in a fight? But—but he's so good-natured. I've never known him to lose his temper..."

Tommy grinned. "Maybe you've never seen him with a few too many drinks in him. He was fighting, sure enough. You ought to see the beautiful purple shiner he's wearing on his right eye!"

Clarice reached out an arm and gathered her friend close. "Tommy," she said huskily, "we've got to do our best to make things easier for Kay this week-end. You've no idea how much she counted on seeing Paul. She even wrangled a date for me. A farmer with a car. Kay thought if we showed him

a good time at the dance tonight, he might offer to take us for a drive tomorrow afternoon."

"So you're playing cupid again?" Tommy demanded of Kay, sending her a fierce scowl.

"I suppose you'd like to have her sit around and grow lines in her pretty face worrying about you," she snapped indignantly.

"Children, children," Clarice chided, "there's nothing to quarrel about! Can't we have a nice friendly four-some, just as we'd planned? Can't you see how blue Kay is, without you yapping at her, Tommy? If you're going to spend the whole week-end being difficult, I swear I'll go back to camp and stay there."

Tommy drew a long breath and yielded. "All right. But if I see this guy make so much as one pass at you, I won't be accountable."

It was Kay who tried to back out on the whole proposition. "I don't want to be cheered up," she declared haughtily. "I don't want to go to the dance tonight, and I don't want to go for any drive tomorrow. In fact, I'd much prefer just to sit home and be miserable by myself, without making everyone else be miserable with me."

"You know darned good and well you can get out of your date with Pat if you really want to, Clarice. Just tell him the truth and let it go at that. What do you care if he gets peeved—now that Tommy is here?"

Clarice shrugged. "I don't care about him, darling. It's you I'm worried about. You rescued me when I was moping around like a lost gosling. Now, the least I can do is return the favor. You're coming right along with us tonight, and Tommy's going to be very sweet to you and help you forget that Paul's locked up. Aren't you, Tommy?" she asked with a proud, glowing smile, as though she believed her man capable of any miracle you could name.

Tommy melted. "If you say so, Kit-

ten." And his lips found hers in a long, kiss.

That's how it was that Kay's first dance was with Tommy, while Clarice danced with Pat, who looked taller, and browner, and more distinguished than ever in his summer flannels. Try as she would to harden herself against Pat, she was forced to admit that the mere sight of him excited her, set all her nerves to tingling.

It's just because I'm so hurt and disappointed over Paul's actions!—she told herself without conviction.

In spite of the open sides, the pavilion was still warm with the heat accumulated during the day, when the sun had beat mercilessly down on it. When the dance ended, the couple gravitated into the moonlit, pine-scented air of the surrounding groves.

Tommy was saying to Kay, "Sometimes I don't know why I put up with Clarice. Did you see her working overtime at the job of making me jealous? She's convinced that's the way to keep a guy interested. Well, more than one can play at that game. Here they come, so get ready to be kissed, woman."

Before she could protest, he had her pinned against his chest and his too soft, too hot mouth was crushed down on hers in a kiss that revolted her and robbed her of the power to breathe.

But if he had hoped to anger Clarice, his plan backfired. The redhead's laugh tinkled out on the heady night air. "Kissing seems to be in vogue," she remarked to Pat, and winding her arms around his neck, she planted her brilliant mouth on his.

DISGUSTED to the very depths of her soul, Kay squirmed free and fled into the darkness. When she was out of sight of the others, she sat down on a log and sobbed, scrubbing the horrid taste of Tommy's kiss from her lips, and wondering dismally how she could have been such a fool to let her-

self get so involved in a petty intrigue that did not concern her.

"If I ever get out of this," she cried brokenly, "I'll never play Cupid again as long as I live."

An azalea bush a couple of feet away rustled, and a white clad figure took the place beside her on the log. "What's the matter, Kay? Aren't you happy now that your boy friend's here?"

She looked at him dully. "I came out here because I wanted to be alone," she informed him. "What do you mean my boy friend?"

His eyes puzzled. "Is that little red-headed vamp trying to cut in on your time with Tommy? Just say the word and I'll keep her out of circulation till you win him back. Looked to me like he was kissing you as if he meant it, though."

"Tommy was just trying to make Clarice jealous," she sniffed. "What on earth did she tell you, anyhow?"

"She told me you were terribly in love with Tommy, but that he was beginning to cool toward you and become interested in her, instead. She said she bet he'd ask you to return his ring before the week-end was over—and offer it to her."

"Why—why—that little—" Kay spluttered, at a loss for words.

"Don't worry about her," he said warmly, squeezing her hand. "You could take any man in the world away from her—if you really tried."

She lifted the creamy oval of her face and studied him, her eyes troubled. "You really think so?" she asked softly.

"I know so," he declared.

The next moment she was held very tight against his hard young body, and his breath was warm against her cheek.

"No," she said faintly, trying to push him away. Somehow she felt a premonition that if she let him kiss her, it would wipe out the memory of any other kiss she'd ever had, includ-

ing those of Paul, whom she thought she loved.

"Yes," he replied, huskily but distinctly, "I can't stand to see you cry so I'm going to kiss all the tears out of your eyes and right out of your heart."

WARM, TINGLING, deliberate lips closed her eyes gently; swept down the curve of her cheek, feeling their way toward the sweet, trembling mouth. Kay tried vainly to fight off the strange dizziness that was encompassing her. But then his lips held hers, compelling them to soften—to give as much to that kiss as they took.

Her hands relaxed, stopped shoving, found their way up to his shoulders and frankly clung to him, pulling him still closer. She was limp and helpless and strangely exultant, in the clutch of an emotion she'd never even dreamed of before.

Finally he raised his head and stared down at her. "I dare you to tell me now that you are in love with Tommy," he said.

"I'm not in love with Tommy," she admitted frankly. "I never have been."

"Then why in the devil were you bawling your pretty eyes out over him? And why are you wearing his diamond?"

"It's not—" she began uneasily, but at that moment Clarice accosted them with:

"Well, this is a nice how-do-you-do! What is this, anyhow, a share-the-boy-friend fiesta? Come on back to the dance, Kay, before that pesky Tommy of yours clouds up and rains all over the place."

Kay's eyes were wide and incredulous. Could Clarice honestly have the nerve to pretend that Tommy and Kay were...

"Clarice," she said stiffly, "I think you and I had better have a serious talk. If you'll excuse us, Pat."

But the redhead was having none of that. "Later, honey," she said airily, "Pat has this dance with me. You'll

find Tommy around on the other side of the pavilion." And linking her arm with Pat's she strolled nonchalantly onto the dance floor.

Kay just stood there, feeling like a bubble that had burst. Presently Tommy hunted her out and remarked morosely:

"The longer I know Clarice, the less I know her."

"Same here," Kay agreed.

"Did you really rope in the bumpkin for her?"

"Yes, but I'd no idea she'd fall for him. She was so unhappy, worrying about you, I thought he'd be a diversion—"

"He is, I guess. And I don't know how much more I can take of being wound around her little finger. Will you please tell me why I was sap enough to agree to act as your comforter tonight?"

"I can't imagine," she said stiffly, "and moreover I don't know why I was not consulted before having to accept you as a substitute for Paul!" Her fury was mounting until she was fairly seething with it.

"Aw-w-w, I didn't mean that the way it sounded, kid," he said apologetically. "But you know how I feel about Clarice. We—"

"No! I don't know and I don't care. All I know is how I feel about her. If I had my way, I'd snatch all that red hair out of her head and use it for a dust mop. And right now I've had all of this party I can take. Good night!" She whirled and stalked off down the path toward Camp Catawka, her starched dimity evening gown making a soft swish around her ankles.

She heard someone calling her name, but she ignored it. Clarice had started this tangle of lies. Let her straighten it out, she thought grimly.

Later, lying on her own cot and looking out the screened window at the moon, she found time to remember and wonder about the way Pat Murdock had kissed her—and the way his kiss

had made her feel. Like the sun and moon and stars were rolled up together to light a flame in her heart.

It was something that must be forgotten, tomorrow. But tonight it was nice to remember. It was the only nice, the only real thing in Kay's world, tonight.

Chapter 4

THE NEXT morning found Clarice planning a foursome picnic as blithely as though nothing untoward had happened last night.

"You can count me out," Kay told her with icy deliberation.

"What's eating you, anyhow, honey?" her friend asked silkily. "You wanted me to get interested in Pat, and I did. I even turned Tommy over to you to console you for having arrived in Paul's place."

"Thanks, too much, for cooking up that lie about Tommy being my fiancé! If you want to be rid of your soldier boy friend, you'll have to find someone else to take him off your hands. Personally, I'm through!"

"Now, Kay, don't be like that. Will it make you any happier if we trade around today? You to be Pat's girl, and me to stick with Tommy?"

Kay's eyes narrowed suspiciously. "What kind of a lie have you worked out to cover it?"

"Nò lie at all," she denied—too promptly to deceive Kay. "But when we're ready to start out, I'll climb in the back seat with Tommy. Then there'll be nothing for you to do but to get in front with Pat."

In the end, it was the chance to see Pat again that made her agree, Kay knew. She wanted another opportunity to observe his actions towards Clarice, see if he really cared for the redhead. She had a feeling he was nothing but a fickle two-timer—the kiss proved that, didn't it?—but it might be interesting to discover if he was interested in any one girl, or just playing the field.

She wore her olive green gabardine slacks and shirt, mostly to keep Clarice from asking to borrow them. Clarice's own slack suit was a drab, faded blue, that didn't do the interesting things to her brilliant hair and eyes which the green would have done.

PAT ARRIVED at ten-thirty, and oddly it was he who made the suggestion that Kay sit up in front with him.

"I want to talk to you," he said, looking at her intently.

"No more lectures, I hope?" she returned. She felt her blood rushing through her veins; she felt like dancing, singing, laughing. Pat wanted her to sit with him, and she was glad.

Why—she was in love with him!

The realization hit her squarely between the eyes. She wasn't upset over Clarice's petty pranks. She was upset because she didn't know if Pat cared for her the way she cared for him! It was the terrible ache of not knowing that made her feel so empty and lost, deep down inside of her.

From the way Clarice was pouting, and slouched down in the back seat as they rode over to Shady Pines to pick up Tommy, Kay was pretty sure she'd had no intention of letting Pat and Kay team up for the day. At least, she seemed unreasonably peeved that the decision was lifted right out of her hands.

But the couple in front ignored her.

"Why did you run away last night?" Pat asked, and there were warm, intimate overtones in his voice.

Kay replied thoughtfully, "I was suddenly very tired of being pulled this way and that, without having my wishes consulted. I was also tired of being the center of a pack of lies that I hadn't started and don't approve of." She sent a sharp, significant glance over her shoulder at the sulking Clarice.

Pat caught the glance, but did not comment on it. Instead he reached

down, felt for and found the diamond on Kay's engagement finger.

"No one put this here by force, did he?" he asked softly.

"No-o-o-o," she admitted. "I thought I wanted it—at the time it was given to me."

"But you don't, now?"

"No. I don't want it, now," she confessed, and knew there were bright red spots on her cheeks.

He persisted, "Then why don't you give it back?"

"I will," she promised solemnly, "the very first chance I get."

He seemed to be satisfied with her promise, for he squeezed her hand hard before he dropped it, and the yellow lights were fairly blazing in his eyes when they looked into hers, as he brought the car to a stop in front of the adult camp, Shady Pines.

Neither of them paid any attention to Clarice as she flounced out of the back seat, ran up to the cabin Tommy had taken for the night before, and disappeared into its interior.

"I won't tell you what I'm thinking right now. I won't say any of the things I want to say—until I know you've broken your engagement," Pat declared.

Kay whispered shyly, "You don't mind if I guess at a few of them, do you?"

"No, I don't mind. But how do you suppose Tommy will feel, when he sees how things are between us? I wouldn't blame him if he felt like killing me. And we can't be together and not let him see. He'd be blind if he didn't—"

"Tommy?" Kay echoed absently, wondering for a moment what Tommy had to do with all this. Then she remembered with a start. Clarice's lie. She looked toward the cabin and saw the pair of them coming down the path. She'd have to hurry, if she got out any kind of an explanation before they arrived.

She said with an excited rush of words: "Get this straight, Pat. I care

nothing whatever about Tommy, and he feels the same about me. It's Clarice he's crazy about and always has been. He's so jealous of her, because she had that date with you last night, that he's still doing a slow burn. Watch his eyes when he looks at you—"

TOMMY WAS, at the moment, fairly glaring at his rural rival.

Pat frowned thoughtfully, especially when he saw the glare shift and encompass Kay.

"You're imagining things, Kay," he muttered wearily. "The poor guy's jealous, all right, but it's because I'm with you. You better get in the back seat with him, before he explodes. And give him back his ring the first chance you get, won't you, dearest?"

Kay sighed. How could she explain to him that Tommy was burned up at her only because Clarice had shoved the lion's share of the blame off on her for last night's spider web of lies?

How could she explain anything, now that the other couple was within earshot? So she said simply and firmly:

"I'm staying right where I am. Clarice gets no more help from me in working her way out of her own tangles." She called to them with false cheeriness:

"Step on it, you two. Pat and I would like to have this picnic today. Wouldn't we, Pat?"

"It doesn't look like a very gay party to me, but if we are going to continue with it, I guess we might as well be moving," Pat conceded.

Tommy announced, gloomily "It's okay with me if you call it off." But he opened the back door for Clarice, and climbed in after her.

Kay forced a smile and shot it in his general direction. "What's the matter, Tommy?" she asked. "You don't look like you slept well; and also as though you might have gotten up on the wrong side of the bed."

"Right on both counts," he snapped.

"How would you feel if you were a soldier who'd looked forward to seeing his sweetheart, and then found her making eyes at another man? How would you feel, Kay? I'm asking you!" he said harshly.

He had addressed the words to Kay, but he was looking directly and accusingly at Clarice. If only Pat's rear view mirror would show him that revealing picture!

She turned to look at him hopefully, and her heart sank with a sickening thud. Because he wasn't looking at the rear view mirror. He wasn't even watching where he was driving. His accusing eyes were on Kay's startled, reddening face. She knew in that moment that she must look guilty as the devil. If only she'd had time to explain that Paul had given her the ring, not Tommy. That Tommy was Clarice's property, and only the redhead's lies had made him seem otherwise!

But then Pat would be justified in asking: "If that's the case, why did you play Cupid, trying to cook up an affair between the redhead and me?"

She moistened her lips, shifted her glance to the morose couple in the back seat. If she could drive them to the admission that they were "that way" about each other, and no one else...

"Why don't you two kiss and make up?" she asked pointedly.

"After what he's just said?" Clarice glared indignantly. "I wouldn't kiss him now if he was the last man on earth!"

"It wasn't very gallant of you, Tommy," Kay scolded gently. "A girl has a right to change her mind, hasn't she? Or maybe she thought you were just kidding, and she was kidding, too—never had any intention of calling on you for a few hours' rendezvous."

"The girl I'm referring to knew I was serious, all right, and so was she. As for the rendezvous, as you call it, this wouldn't have been the first one. The last time we got together it wasn't just for a stolen hour. It was for the

most wonderful weekend I've ever had in all my life. We did New York City thoroughly, from Times Square to Coney Island and back again. And from our East Side hotel room, we lay snuggled in each other's arms and watched the sun come up over Brooklyn—"

"Tommy, for God's sake stop!" Clarice cried. "You must be insane to start blabbing things like that!"

"Who wouldn't be insane—going from the dream of a weekend like that, to the nightmare of one like this? And who's responsible for it?" he grated.

"I'm interested," Pat said grimly. "Who is responsible?"

Kay held her breath, waiting for Tommy's answer. If he made the right one, it could clear up so much...

BUT HE DIDN'T. He declared harshly. "You're as much responsible as anybody, Pat Murdock. You, with your good looks and your smooth line, playing on a girl's loneliness for a man she really loves! Between you and Kay—"

"No, you don't, Tommy," Kay interrupted furiously. "I refuse to be dragged any deeper into this mess. If I'd had any idea in the world of how things stood between you and Clarice, you can bet your last dime I'd have given you both such wide berth you wouldn't have known I was in shouting distance!"

"Now, will you please clear up one more point so there'll never be any further mistakes and misunderstandings about it? Tommy, how do you feel about Clarice?"

"I hate her," he declared vehemently.

Kay gasped. This wasn't helping...

"Have you always hated her?" she persisted doggedly.

"No, of course not. What are you driving at, anyhow? Why the questionnaire about things you already know the answers to?"

"I know them, but Pat doesn't," she

explained dejectedly. "I've tried to convince him that it is Clarice you came here to see, but he won't believe me. He's even got the idea that you gave me this diamond ring. Did you, Tommy?"

"No," he admitted gloomily. "If I'd bought you a diamond, it would have had to be the Woolworth variety. I guess I'm just a plain ordinary fool to expect any girl to be true to a guy who can't even afford to buy her a ring."

He was looking at—and talking to Clarice again, but again Pat was unaware of the fact. Kay knew it was no use, but she made one more attempt:

"All right, Tommy, will you at least do this? Tell this stupid farmer here that you are not engaged to me, and never were. That I'm not the girl you were referring to when you were making your long and morbid complaint."

He recited dully, without conviction. "Kay's not my girl and never was. I wasn't referring to her when I was spiling my spiel."

"And now—will you please cancel the picnic, and dump me off at the bus terminal?"

"Right," Pat assented sharply, made a U-turn and headed toward the village.

No one spoke during the return trip, but the silence was weighted with words that were fighting for utterance.

Pat kept his eyes on the road now, and his profile might have been carved from granite, it was so hard and grim and bitter.

There was a terrific lump in Kay's throat that she couldn't seem to swallow no matter how much she tried. And a mist kept coming into her eyes that blurred the landscape. The unrelenting silence in the rear seat made her realize more clearly than ever how hopeless it was to expect any cooperation from either Tommy or Clarice toward untangling the snarl of deceit.

How—oh how could she startle Pat into the realization that Tommy was

scarcely aware of her existence as a person, let alone as a sweetheart?

NOTHING constructive suggested itself to her until they were standing, a dull, lifeless, miserable group, at the edge of the highway, waiting for the westbound Greyhound to arrive.

Tommy's glazed, bloodshot eyes were studying Clarice, while she was avoiding his look and concentrating on the toe of her sandal.

Pat was just standing there, waiting, gazing unseeingly out into the distance. It was Tommy who broke the unbearable silence:

"No use in you people waiting around. I might as well get used to waiting for busses—alone."

For the first time in an hour Clarice spoke, and her voice sounded choked with stifled sobs. "Oh, why does everything have to end like this? I only wanted a little fun! What's the harm—" she broke off helplessly.

Still without looking at her, Pat said in a voice pitched so low as to reach no one's ears but Kay's, "Why don't you kiss him and tell him you're sorry? Don't let him leave you like this!"

That's what gave her the idea.

Without stopping to weigh the consequences, she threw her arms around Pat's neck and cried, "Oh, Pat, darling! I am so sorry! Don't go away from me now, thinking all those horrible lies you are thinking!" She pressed her lips on his, but found them firm and unyielding.

She couldn't have felt worse if he'd slapped her, she thought unhappily. So she dropped her arms and stepped back, looking questioningly at the other couple. If Pat could see that Tommy was unconcerned over Kay's actions, wouldn't that prove the soldier didn't care about her?

And Tommy very obviously was not concerned. He and Clarice were carrying on a tense and intimate conversation that set them apart in a world of their own.

Pat followed Kay's glance, and she

could see that even anyone as abysmally stupid as he was wondering. He said thoughtfully:

"I don't believe he even saw that clever little act of yours. Luckily for both of us."

"Why luckily?" she snapped. "I wanted him to see it. Why do you think I kissed you?"

"Good Lord!" he groaned. "Haven't you any heart at all? I always heard blondes were cold-blooded, but I never met one the equal of you! Haven't you tortured that poor devil enough for one day?"

"All right!" Kay screamed. "Go on being so blind you can't see what's going on under your very nose! Look at them! Are they interested in us? No. They're so wrapped up in their own affairs they don't know we exist. But you've got an obsession and Heaven itself couldn't rid you of it."

"Well, I'm sorry I ever imagined I was in love with anyone as dumb as you. Get out of my life before I explode, will you?"

He looked a little dazed, moistened his lips and asked: "But you are engaged?"

"Yes. But not to Tommy. To a guy named Paul, who was supposed to show up and didn't."

"Are you in love with this—this Paul?"

"No, dope. I'm in love with you, worse luck!"

He smiled a little. At least Kay chose to call it a smile, although it was still a shade on the vague, uncertain side.

"Why did Clarice say you were engaged to Tommy?" he asked presently.

"I wouldn't know, but I've got my suspicions. I suggest you ask her that question, the first opportunity you have—when Tommy's not around to confuse the issue."

"All right, I will," he asserted, looking deeply and searchingly into her eyes. "If you're telling me the truth,

Kay, and if you'll break off your engagement—we'll have the most wonderful life together you've ever imagined!

"But if you're lying to me, I swear I'll wring your pretty little neck! I'd just as lief marry a woman who steals as one who lies, and gets herself involved in petty intrigues. Our marriage has to be beautiful and honest and above-board, or I don't want any part of it. Do you understand, Kay?"

She nodded solemnly. "I understand and agree with you. I'd want it that way, too, or not at all. I couldn't endure being married to a man if I thought he didn't trust me."

They were so busy talking they didn't realize the bus had arrived, until they saw Tommy climbing on.

"Good-bye, Tommy," Kay called after him.

He turned in the doorway and looked at her, not smiling nor waving nor replying to her cheerful farewell. His look was that of a complete stranger, and it made her forget her newly found happiness for a moment, feeling as though a chill wind preceding a storm had swept over her.

Chapter 5

PAINSTAKINGLY Kay wrote to Paul and broke the news to him that she was no longer wearing his ring, and desired the engagement to be broken. She explained that it had been a mistake, that she hadn't realized the affection she'd held for him was more of the sisterly—or even motherly variety than the terribly romantic way a girl should feel toward her future husband.

She didn't mention Pat, wanting to spare Paul's feelings and pride all she could. She didn't even tell him that she'd just been in love with the idea of love—and that he'd been the victim because he was on hand at the moment.

It was obvious to her now that this

was the case. How could a girl distinguish between imagined love and the real article until she'd met the real article?

Pat was the real article, for Kay. If she were Cupid, her arrow had boomeranged this time and landed squarely in the center of her own tempestuous heart. She couldn't even think about Pat without feeling both cold and hot; both thrilled and frightened. She resolved she'd make up to him for all the doubts he'd suffered about her, due to the false idea that she was Tommy's girl.

Poor Tommy! Funny, how she'd been sorry for Clarice, and now her pity was all for Tommy. Just went to show what a poor judge of character she was. Well, she knew now, and she was through with Clarice, definitely.

She reread her letter to Paul, that evening; then strolled down to the postbox by the Casino to mail it.

As the mailbox lever clicked shut, the sound was echoed by that of an unmistakable laugh—coming from the dining-room of the Casino. Clarice was in there, and she must be with a man. She was never known to waste that particular laugh on another girl!

Kay looked around for something to stand on that would lift her high enough to peer through that open window. The only thing handy was the running-board of a parked car. She was already stepping up on it before she realized it was Pat's car! And at the table just inside the window were Clarice and Pat!

Kay's heart did one spasmodic jerk and settled down with a dull thud into the pit of her stomach.

So this was all his fine talk about their love being beautiful and honest and above-board had meant! It applied only to the feminine side of the bargain—it didn't mean the man in the case had any intention of being honest and above-board!

She was so furious she felt fairly seething inside as she headed for the

path that led back to Camp Catakwa.

She was still wide awake when she heard Clarice come in and get ready for bed. At first she meant to pretend to be asleep, but her curiosity got the better of her.

"Have a nice evening?" she asked coldly.

"Average," the redhead returned guardedly. "Why?"

"Just wondered. I thought I heard your voice—and also that of Pat, in the Casino. I'd gone down there to mail a letter."

"You did, probably. We were there awhile. So what?" Her taunt was insolent.

"Nothing. Only I'm sort of surprised at Pat for wanting to take up one of Tommy's cast-offs." It was a horrid barb, but once she'd started, Kay felt goaded to continue.

Clarice was silent for a moment, then she said bitterly, "So far as Pat is concerned, I never had anything more than a mild flirtation with Tommy. Maybe you partly unsold him on the idea that I was Tommy's flame, instead of you, but I sold it back to him tonight. I told him you played up to him just to make Tommy jealous, and for no other reason. It sounded logical, too, because before that you'd sort of ignored Pat, you know—throwing me at his head, when you could have had him yourself without half trying. But with Tommy paying too much attention to me, it was a different matter, I explained."

"Doesn't honesty mean anything to you?" Kay choked.

"Not when I can't get what I want without ignoring it."

"And what do you want?"

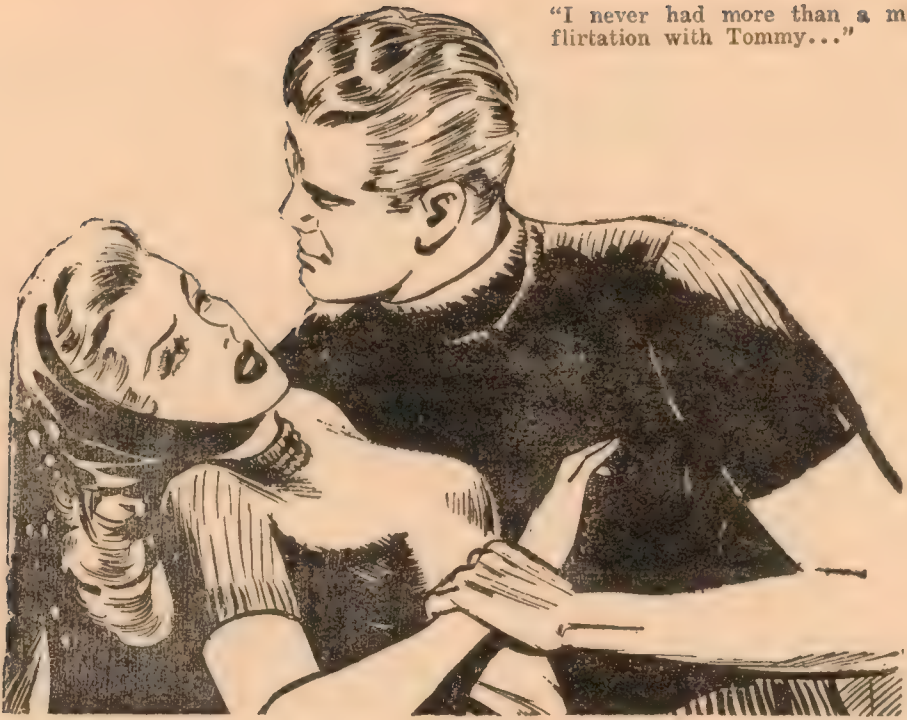
"I want Pat Murdock," she declared defiantly.

"Even if you get him on the rebound, and because of an out-and-out lie?"

"Even if all that, and more!"

Kay groaned and turned her back to the redhead. "And to think I once

"I never had more than a mild flirtation with Tommy..."



imagined you were my friend!" she muttered inaudibly.

Long after Clarice's even breathing proclaimed she was asleep, Kay lay awake, wondering what she could do to thwart the lying, hateful little cheat of her deadly purpose.

Tommy seemed to be the only logical conclusion. If she wrote to Tommy and told him the whole sordid story, surely he would at least vindicate Kay. He'd been too upset to realize the kind of underhanded intrigue his girl was plotting against Kay. Tommy might not be a noble character, but at least he was fair-minded.

Writing to him was certainly no more unfair than the tactics Clarice was using.

She got cautiously out of bed, took some letter paper, a stamped envelope and a pencil with her to the washroom, where she could turn on the light without awakening anyone. There she wrote Tommy the whole story, including the fact that Clarice had been out with Pat again tonight and was set on marrying him under false pretenses.

With the letter sealed and clutched in one fist, she lighted her way by use of her flashlight and walked down to the mailbox—the second time in one night.

TWO DAYS later she had a wire from Tommy:

BRING PAT HERE. I WILL CLEAR EVERYTHING UP.

How on earth was she going to do that?—she wondered, when Pat wasn't coming within shouting distance of her? When he was spending all his spare time with Clarice!

Maybe he's not worth having anyhow, if he's that fickle!—she thought hopelessly.

But the fact remained that she wanted him—worth having or not.

So she pocketed her pride and hiked over to his home the first morning she wasn't required to teach swimming. It was cold and raining, which cancelled the swimming period, and didn't do anything complimentary to Kay's appearance. She wore a cumbersome black slicker and her boots. And the

rain poured down on her face and washed off all the make-up. But with grim determination she strode on.

It must have been Pat's sister who answered the door. She looked like him, sort of.

"Is Pat here?" Kay asked dully.

"Why, yes. He's in the library. Won't you take off your wet things? You're drenched."

Kay forced a half-hearted smile and shed the slicker and boots.

"Go right on in," the girl advised cheerfully. "He's reading."

Kay took a deep breath and went into the library. Pat looked up from his paper, his eyes startled, then narrowed with distrust.

She recited her piece with a rush of words: "Pat, maybe I'm partly to blame for the horrible things you think about me, but not entirely. The only real mistake I made was when I introduced you to Clarice, and I had no idea how much there was between Tommy and her or I never would have."

"She tells the reverse of that yarn," he said evenly. "Who am I to believe? And why?"

She moistened her lips. "Would you believe Tommy?"

He weighed that carefully. "I might, but if I remember correctly you tried to get him to incriminate Clarice, and he was not very cooperative."

"He had no idea what she was trying to put over. I wrote him the whole thing the other night and here is his reply." She handed him the telegram. "Will you go to him and ask him about it?"

He considered that for so long she was sure he meant to refuse. Finally he said: "Will you come along?"

"Yes, if you want me to."

"Come on then. Let's be going."

IT WAS THE queerest trip Kay had ever experienced. The rain continued to pour down on the deserted high-

way, and Pat's car merely crept along, he drove so cautiously.

Or was he driving so slowly to postpone the moment when he would know the truth about the two girls who were in love with him? Kay wasn't sure. Nothing was said. They didn't even glance at each other.

At last they were at camp, and a soldier had gone to find Tommy for them. They waited, still in silence, just outside the gates.

They both started at the sound of Tommy's voice. But his words were more surprising than his tone, if possible.

"What's this I hear about you and my wife, Pat Murdock?" he demanded belligerently.

"Your wife?!" Pat's glance went with lightning speed from the man to the girl. Her mouth was open and she was staring, evidently as much surprised as he. "I didn't know you had a wife. What's her name?" he demanded breathlessly, as though he'd just run up a long, steep flight of stairs.

"Oh, you didn't! I thought I made it fairly clear when I was there Sunday. I should have known why Clarice was so anxious to keep our marriage a secret. It's simply impossible for her to be true to any one man."

"Clarice!" Pat exclaimed on a sudden explosion of expelled breath. "Then why were you kissing Kay, outside the dance pavilion?"

Tommy shrugged, "Silly idea of getting even, and maybe making my wife jealous. I should have known I was playing right into her hands. That she wanted to be rid of me."

Pat was looking at Kay again, only this time his eyes were shining, and pleading for her forgiveness. "You know the fellow Kay's engaged to?"

"Sure. Paul. He's waiting outside to see her, when you're through with me. Incidentally, I brought along Clarice's and my marriage certificate, in case you're still doubtful." He handed it to Pat, and said to Kay:

"Sorry I didn't get what you were driving at Sunday, Kay. You see I didn't know the lie Clarice was telling about you and me. And I was burned up at you for introducing her to Pat. But I know now if it hadn't been him, it would have been some one else. It's a physical impossibility for that woman to be true.

"I'll bring Paul in." He turned and stepped outside, returning with the ruddy-checked, overgrown boy to whom Kay had once thought she was so devoted.

Paul grinned his nice, homely grin and said good-naturedly:

"I've got no hard feelings, Kay. Wish you the best of everything. This the man who's taken my place?"

Kay smiled and blushed. "Please, Paul, Pat hasn't asked me, yet."

"Don't worry, I will, soon as you give this man his ring," Pat declared.

Kay produced it from her purse, and said, "I'm sorry, Paul."

"That's all right. I'd make a heck

of a husband, anyhow. I always told you that. I hope this guy's good to you. If he's not, let me know and I'll knock his block off."

"And land in the guardhouse again?"

He looked shamefaced and said. "I hear Tommy caused plenty of headaches for you, by showing up in my place."

"Heartaches," Pat amended, "but I intend to spend the rest of my life seeing that she doesn't have any more of them."

A few minutes later they were in the car, ready to start back toward the resort. Pat gathered Kay into his arms and kissed her until she couldn't breathe, and didn't want to. "It's been so long," he said, "as though I'd lived through agonizing years of not having you in my arms."

She nodded assent. "And all because I was so busy playing Cupid I didn't recognize love when it struck me."

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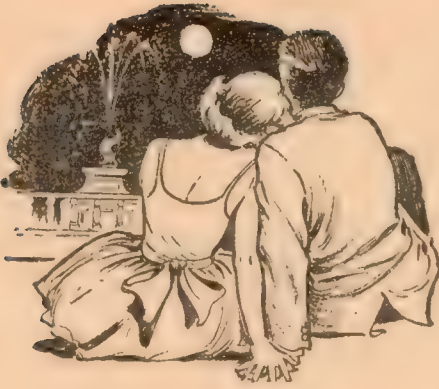
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TODAY'S LOVE STORIES



Two's a Crowd

by

Barbara

Bonham

When he put two and two
together, he got five ...

KRISS STARED at her parents, a plea for understanding in her eyes as well as on her lips, and then turned hopefully toward her sister Karen. It was like gazing into a mirror, so identical were they. Long platinum blonde hair worn in a pony tail, blue eyes behind black lashes, the same straight nose, the same fair skin, the same height. The only difference between them was that Kriss weighed two pounds less than Karen. It was her only claim to individuality. The only trouble was, it wasn't noticeable. They were like two leaves on a tree, one indistinguishable from the other. Even their parents couldn't tell them apart sometimes.

"But Kriss," her mother was asking, "why do you want to go so far away from home?" Her own blonde hair was so light hardly anyone was aware that she was beginning to gray.

"Mother, New York City isn't so far away. It's only an overnight trip by train. It's far enough away though and big enough so I can lose myself in it. I'll be Kriss Morgan. I'll make friends, maybe fall in love with a nice boy and all on my own. I'll be a real person, an individual like other people instead of being half of something."

"Baby, you aren't half of anything!" her father protested heartily.

"Yes I am," Kriss said desperately. "I'm half of the Morgan twins. No one ever thinks of Karen and I as individuals. We're simply 'those Morgan twins'." She saw the puzzled look on her twin sister's face and threw her arms around her. "Oh, Karen, it isn't that I resent being your twin. I love you and I'll miss you terribly but I've got to do this thing. If I don't, I'll never be happy."

Karen hugged her. "Well, go on then and make yourself happy. I'll admit I don't understand you, but we won't keep you here against your will. Will we, Daddy? Mother? Say she can go."

Their father shrugged his shoulders and ran a hand through his thinning

hair. "Of course you can go, honey, if that's what you want. Maybe your mother and I have made a mistake never separating you before this. I've read where sometimes it's a good idea to separate twins in school, put them in different classes with different teachers but you girls always seemed so close and—" His voice trailed off.

"We are close," Kriss said, "and I wouldn't have had it any other way. But we're twenty one now. We've been through school and college together and now I'd like to go out on my own and prove to myself I can be liked, loved and accepted as an individual and not as one half of a set of twins."

So she went. There were last minute protests from her parents and plaintive questions such as, "Are you *sure* this is what you want?" She assured them for the hundredth time that it was and turned to say goodbye to Karen. As she and Karen hugged each other and promised to write often Kriss experienced a feeling of emptiness she had never felt before. Not since the moment the good Lord had made them had they ever been apart. Now she was going away alone. She knew it was only a prelude to the awful loneliness she would know later and for a moment there beside the train she wavered. Then quickly before she could change her mind she kissed Karen and climbed aboard the train. Standing there, waving to the three of them as the train moved off, Kriss felt as if a part of her had been wrenched from her and left behind.

ON THE TRAIN it seemed that the wheels were ticking off far more miles than they actually were. When she had told her parents and Karen of the plan, New York hadn't sounded far away at all. Now it seemed half way across the world from home. Karen was probably getting ready for bed by now in their gay chintz and maple bedroom. Kriss could almost picture her sister sitting before the dressing

table mirror brushing her long platinum hair which Kriss regarded as a curse. Being identical twins and beautiful to boot wasn't enough. They had to have *that* hair. It always attracted so much attention Kriss felt like some freak on display in a carnival sideshow.

Oh, well, that was over now, she told herself. When people look at me from now on they'll see one person not two. I'll feel almost normal.

Within a week after her arrival in New York she had found a job and a place to live but she didn't feel normal. She was so horribly lonely she couldn't feel anything else.

She did enjoy her job however. She worked in one of the big department stores making sketches of ladies ready to wear for newspaper advertisements. It gave her a certain amount of satisfaction to think the four years she had spent at college majoring in art were now resulting in something constructive and worthwhile.

She was one of two girls doing the ad sketches. The other was Marcy Henderson. Marcy was about Kriss' own height, 5 ft. 4 in., with short dark hair, curious blue eyes and a seemingly inexhaustible source of energy and good humor. It was she who explained Kriss' job to her and showed her around the store.

It was also Marcy who noticed Kriss' misery after only one week at her new job.

"What's the matter, honey? Got the blues?" she asked one morning bending down to meet Kriss' teary eyes over her sketching board. "Don't let old Teasdale get you down. She rides everyone in her department."

"It isn't her," Kriss said sniffing. "In fact she's no worse than a professor I once had."

"What is it then?"

Kriss gave Marcy a crooked, sheepish grin. "I'm lonesome and homesick. I know I'm a baby but I can't help it. This is the first time I've ever been away from home."

"But you went away to college," Marcy said puzzled.

"I know, but my sister Karen, went with me. We've—we've never been separated. I miss her most of all."

Marcy patted her shoulder and then stood thoughtfully for a moment, biting her lip. "Why don't you come and live with me?" she asked finally. "I'd be glad to share expenses with someone. Do you think you could stand living and working with me?"

"Do I!" Kriss exclaimed. "Oh, Marcy, I'd love it."

Marcy grinned down at her. "Well, it's settled then. Move in as soon as you like."

"How about tonight? If I spend another night alone in the place of mine I'll go crazy."

"Suits me fine, but the apartment may be in kind of a mess."

"I don't care," Kriss said happily.

MARCY WAS right. The apartment was a little torn up but it looked wonderful to Kriss that night when she arrived with her suitcases. It was cozy, comfortable and lived in and she loved it the moment she saw it. She had a bed of her own, half the chest of drawers and half of the closet. It took some cramming to arrange all their clothes but once it was done Kriss examined the rest of the apartment. Besides the bedroom there was a living room, bath and kitchenette.

"Gosh, Marcy, it feels like home already."

"It's humble but sometimes after a hectic day at the store it looks like heaven." She took Kriss' arm and pulled her toward the kitchen. "Come on. I'll show you where I keep the coffee."

After that, living in New York wasn't so bad. Marcy was pleasant and amusing to live with and for the first time since she left home Kriss felt she was doing the right thing.

There were times still when she felt lonely though. Especially on week ends

when Marcy was busy with her boyfriend Stan. At home there had been no shortage of dates. She and Karen usually double dated. Here in New York it was different. There were plenty of attractive fellows. Kriss saw dozens on the street every day. Meeting them was the problem.

After Kriss had spent a few Saturday nights alone in the apartment, Marcy again came to the rescue, reluctantly this time.

"Stan's got a friend he insists on introducing you to," Marcy told her late one Saturday night when she returned from a date with Stan. "His name is Jim Gordon, he's handsome, he's junior partner in a law firm and he'll probably work his way up into a vice presidency in a few years. That's on the debit side. On the credit side he's cynical and bitter, he hates all women and here's one that feels the same about him."

"He sounds like a ghoul."

Marcy sat on the edge of her bed and slipped out of her shoes and stockings. "Maybe I'm prejudiced and making him out worse than he sounds but he makes me so mad. He was in love with a girl once and all set to propose when she hit him over the head with the news that she is going to marry someone else. Seems she'd been going with this other guy right along too, stringing them both along to see which one could offer her the plushest future. When Jim's rival received a big promotion, that settled that. Jim was left at the post and since then he hasn't a decent word to say to or for a woman."

"That's rough," Kriss said sympathetically.

"Sure it is, but he's not the only one it's happened to. And why blame all women for what one of them did to him. I think there's something wrong with a person who can't take disappointment without turning bitter."

Yes, Marcy would think that, Kriss thought. She was simple and uncompli-

cated and could bounce back from misfortune or disappointment like a ping pong ball. But Kriss, with a new wisdom accumulated as a result of meeting and solving a few problems of her own, found herself feeling a little sorry for Jim Gordon and she told Marcy she was willing to take a chance on him if Stan could arrange it.

The next morning Marcy phoned Stan and told him Kriss was agreeable to his plan. "Tell that character to be on his good behavior or else not bother to come," she warned Stan. "Kriss is a good kid, sincere and unaffected and not at all like the females he seems to be accustomed to."

Kriss could hear Stan on the other end of the line reassuring Marcy and promising to talk to Jim. When she hung up Marcy said, "Well, I've done all I can. Don't blame me if he spends the evening insulting you."

Kriss laughed. "I won't."

THE NEXT evening as the four of them sat in the Black Swan night club, Kriss wondered if Marcy had exaggerated or whether Jim was strictly on his best behavior. She decided maybe it was a little of both. Jim's dark eyes never lost their guarded look nor his manner a certain wariness. He was pleasant and courteous for all that and she found herself liking him very much. Besides that he was one of the handsomest men she had ever met with his lean athletic build and dark wavy hair.

She noticed that Jim kept staring at her hair. She had freed it from its pony tail for the evening and was wearing it loose so that it hung in soft curls around her face and shoulders. During one of their dances she said, "I suppose you're thinking it can't be real. Not with these black eyebrows and lashes."

"I might have thought that except that Stan warned me before hand that you were a genuine platinum blonde." As he gazed down at her, he seemed

to be studying her. Kriss felt as if he were trying hard to fit her into some sort of mold and finding she wouldn't fit.

"I'm afraid Stan and Marcy may have told you all sorts of things about me. I hope you didn't take them too seriously."

"Why? They had only the nicest things to say."

"I'm sure they did. They're nice people," Kriss said, "but I'd prefer to have you make up your own mind about me."

He gave her another queer glance but said nothing.

Later at the apartment, as they tried to make themselves inconspicuous while Stan and Marcy said goodnight, Kriss felt that Jim was relieved that the evening was over. He was quiet and rather stiff and formal. When he said goodnight and walked away she was certain she had seen the last of him.

Thus it was much to her surprise a few nights later when he called and asked if she would like to go ice skating with him in Rockefeller Center the next night. She said she would love to and when she hung up she turned to meet Marcy's questioning eyes.

"I'll bet you can't guess who that was," she said grinning.

"Uh-uh. Who?" Marcy asked tossing her magazine aside.

"Jim Gordon."

Marcy's eyes widened. "You're joking."

Kriss shook her head.

Marcy digested the information for a moment and then said, "I can't believe it. You're the first girl he's even dated in months much less called a second time. What did you do to him?"

"I don't know, but whatever it was, I'm glad it worked. I liked him." She sat down in a chair opposite Marcy.

Marcy shrugged. "Everyone to his own taste, though I will admit he certainly behaved himself Saturday night. He even treated *me* civilly."

"Doesn't he usually?"

Marcy chuckled. "We're usually about as friendly as a bull dog and a Siamese kitten." She stared thoughtfully at Kriss. "Maybe you're just the medicine he needs," she said finally, picking up her magazine again.

THE ICE at Rockefeller Center seemed to have a good effect upon Jim. Kriss noticed that he seemed much more relaxed than he had been in the night club. They skated hand in hand, arm in arm, and finally Jim put his arm around her waist and they waltzed together.

"Where did you learn to skate like this?" he asked her breathlessly, when they finally sat down to catch their breath.

"We have ponds at home. They may not be Rockefeller Center but they're adequate."

"Anyone teach you?" Jim asked, lighting cigarettes for both of them.

Kriss shook her head as she inhaled. "I just learned. I always was a tom-boy. When other girls were playing with dolls, I was out skating or playing marbles with the boys."

"Maybe that explains it."

Kriss looked at him. "Explains what?"

Jim looked away from her, his face stiff and hard. "I don't know, except that you're different. Most girls have one behavior pattern they use among other girls and a different one they use around men. I have a feeling you're the same no matter who you're around."

"I guess maybe I am. I wouldn't know how to act any differently than I do. I don't know why I should. Some of my best friends back home are boys and I'm afraid if I tried a vamp routine around them I'd be cut down to size in a minute."

"Bravo for the boys," Jim exclaimed and took her hand. "Ready to go again?"

"I am if you are."

"Let's go."

Over coffee, later that night, Jim told her a little bit about himself. His college education had been interrupted by a two year hitch in the army and he'd gone back to finish law school. Since graduation he'd been a member of one of the most respected law firms in the city.

"Just one of a dozen eager beavers bucking for a vice presidency," he said deprecatingly. "But I'm willing to wait. Someday there will be room for us younger fellows at the top. It's slow. Too slow, maybe," he said fingering his cup while his eyes burned bitterly.

An instant later he smiled at her and asked, "How about another cup while you tell me about yourself? It's your turn you know."

"All right." She liked his smile. It erased the hard lines that seemed to have been newly etched on his face.

While they drank their second cups of coffee she told him about her high school and college days. She told him her dad was an accountant, that her mother baked the best cakes on the block, and she told him about Karen. She didn't tell him they were twins. She merely told him they looked a lot alike, were very close and that Karen was the oldest. That latter was true but what she didn't tell Jim was that Karen was older by only two and a half minutes.

By the time they finished their second cup of coffee any strangeness that had been between them was gone.

AFTER THAT Jim phoned every night except on the nights they dated which was about three times a week. Marcy was amazed at the seeming change in Jim. Kriss could see a change too. The guarded look and wariness she had noticed on their first date disappeared altogether. In its place was a warmth that made her tingle inside every moment they were together.

One night as they were returning home from a stage play Jim was lucky

enough to get tickets to, he dropped his head and kissed her lips gently. Then his arms went around her, pulling her close and Kriss felt the world drop out from under her. When finally he took his mouth from hers, Kriss knew she was in love with him. She would like to have cried out the fact to him but he said nothing. She read a huskiness into his voice as he said good-night but deep inside she knew it might be just wishful thinking.

The next evening she was alone trying to keep her mind on her mending a few minutes after Jim called, when the doorbell rang. She went to the door, opened it and there stood Karen.

"What on earth are you doing here?" Kriss cried delightedly, pulling her sister inside and hugging her.

"I got so lonesome for you I couldn't stand it. I asked Mr. Williams for a week's vacation and he gave it to me. I may have to work sixteen hours a day when I get back answering insurance claims but I don't care." She set her bag down and gazed around. "Pretty nice."

"Come on, I'll show you around," Kriss said, picking up the bag and leading the way to the bedroom. "Think you can share a twin bed with me? It's either that or the couch and it's kind of lumpy."

"Don't worry about me. I'll make out fine."

They stood for a moment grinning happily at each other and then sat down on the two beds, suitcase forgotten, and chattered excitedly.

They were still at it shortly after midnight when Marcy came home. She walked into the bedroom, took one look and shrieked, "I told Stan I didn't need that night cap!"

"Marcy, she's my sister," Kriss explained, laughing at the expression on her roommate's face.

Marcy collapsed on the bed beside Kriss and said weakly, "You never told me you had a twin."

Kriss glanced at Karen and then

said, "I know," and told Marcy the whole story. "It's just that I had to prove to myself that I could make my mark on the world as an individual that's all," she finished a little self consciously.

"Well you've certainly proved what you set out to prove," Marcy said. "Are you satisfied?"

Kriss leaned over and pressed her hand. "I've made a wonderful friend at least."

"And succeeding in making a woman hater fall in love with you," Marcy reminded her.

"I'm not so sure of that," Kriss said slowly. Then she brightened, "But I still have hopes."

"You mean he hasn't said anything yet?" Karen asked in surprise. "From the sound of your letters I expected him to have proposed before this."

Kriss shook her head. "He hasn't, darn it, and if I have to wait much longer I'll just die."

"That's what you get for falling for a guy like that," Marcy told her. "He'll be as wary as a wild animal scenting danger."

Kriss sighed. "Oh well, I guess maybe I can wait a little while longer. At least this week I'll have a diversion with you here," she said to Karen. "Which reminds me. I'm not ready for Jim to know yet that I'm one half of a freak of nature. Do you mind if—I mean," she said to her sister, "will you sort of keep out of sight when Jim drops by to pick me up for a movie tomorrow night? I'll make some excuse so I won't have to ask him in."

Karen grinned reassuringly. "Sure thing. I'll hide in a closet or something."

Marcy chuckled. "Not in our closet, honey. There isn't even enough room for the clothes." Then with a quizzical glance she asked, "Are you as crazy as she is?"

Karen laughed. "No. I'm the brainy one." She ducked quickly to avoid the pillow Kriss hurled at her.

Marcy rose and headed for the kitchen saying, "I need some coffee after a shock like this. Anyone else?"

THE NEXT night Mrs. Teasdale, Kriss' immediate superior, asked Kriss and Marcy to work overtime on some sketches which she insisted had to be finished before morning.

"The old witch!" Marcy grumbled as the older woman walked away. "Why couldn't she have given us this assignment earlier instead of waiting until the last minute?"

"Maybe she didn't know about it herself until a few minutes ago," Kriss said. "Anyway, let's get to work. I've got a date with Jim, remember?"

"Gosh, that's right. Listen you go on home and get ready. I can do these alone."

"Yes, and you'd be up until midnight doing them. Come on. We can be done in an hour if we hurry."

It took them two hours and when they got home the apartment was empty.

"Where could Karen have gone?" Kriss asked, puzzled.

Marcy had gone into the bedroom and she called out, "Here's a note for you on the pillow."

Kriss rushed in and gasped as she read it aloud.

"Dear Kriss," it said. "Jim came for you half an hour early. I thought it was you and opened the door. He thought I was you and I didn't think I dared tell him the truth. I've gone to the movie with him. Don't worry. After reading the volumes you wrote about him in your letters I think I can carry it off."

Kriss turned slowly toward Marcy, her eyes wide.

"Good lord," Marcy groaned and then seeing the worry in Kriss' eyes she said reassuringly, "I wouldn't worry. I believe Karen. I think she can carry it off." She pointed Kriss toward the bathroom and gave her a gentle

shove. "Go take a nice leisurely shower and relax. I'll fix us some supper."

It was good advice but relaxation was out of the question. The hours that followed were agonizing. Kriss couldn't sit still. She paced from one room to another and consumed quarts of coffee. If only she could know what was going on, what was being said. She had confidence in Karen but the uncertainty was killing her.

Finally she thought she heard voices outside the door and she pulled Marcy into the bedroom. A moment later, Karen entered the apartment, closed the door behind her and leaned against it.

Kriss dashed out of the bedroom crying, "What happened?"

"Everything went fine," Karen said wearily, "but I wouldn't go through that again even for you dear sister."

"What do you mean?" Kriss exclaimed in alarm.

"I mean I was on guard every moment, afraid I might say or do the wrong thing."

"Did you?"

"I don't think so. As far as I could tell he wasn't aware anything was wrong. I'm not sure how the goodnight kiss bit went though. I probably didn't cooperate the way you do."

Kriss collapsed in a chair. "Thanks for doing this for me."

"Don't thank me. If I hadn't popped in here unexpectedly last night this never would have happened. I only hope I did the right thing."

"Of course you did," Kriss said quickly, but deep inside she wondered.

JIM DIDN'T call the next night. He didn't call the night after that either, nor the night after that. Kriss was so sick she could scarcely eat but she forced herself for Karen's sake. Karen was blaming herself, going over and over the events of her evening with Jim trying to discover something she had done wrong or something she might have said to make him angry. Kriss

tried her best to convince Karen the responsibility was hers, not Karen's.

"If it hadn't been for this crazy idea of mine, this might never have happened. I should have told Jim ages ago that I had a twin sister."

"No you shouldn't have," Karen told her stoutly. "Proving this thing to yourself was important to you. It's my fault for coming here and botching things up."

So it went, back and forth all week, until finally it was time for Karen to leave and go back home.

"My return ticket is for the 8:40 a.m. westbound. I'll leave when you girls do in the morning and take a cab to the station."

"I wish you didn't have to go," Kriss told her and bit her lip to keep it from trembling. She had half a notion to pack up and go home with Karen. Suddenly she hated New York City.

"I've been here too long as it is," Karen said. "Six days too long. I should never have come." She pulled her suitcase out from beneath the bed and started packing. "You might come home with me."

Kriss watched her pack. "Yes, I might," she said miserably.

Just then the phone rang and both girls jumped. Kriss ran into the living room and found Marcy hovering eagerly over the phone but refusing to touch it.

Kriss picked it up with trembling fingers and said weakly, "Hello?"

"Kriss? This is Jim."

Kriss groped for a chair and half fell into it. "Yes?"

"I thought if you were going to be home this evening I might drop your ice skates off. You left them in the back seat of my car the last time we went skating."

"I—I'll be home, Jim."

"All right. I'll be by in about an hour."

He hung up and Kriss sat there without moving until finally Marcy took the phone from her and replaced it in

its cradle. "What did he say?" she asked excitedly. Both she and Karen crowded around her expectantly.

"He's going to drop by and return my skates."

"Ho ho! You're in business again," Marcy cried triumphantly.

"Maybe," Kriss said quietly, hardly daring to hope. Jim's voice had sounded a little strange. She turned to Karen. "When Jim comes, I'm going to tell him the truth and I may as well do it up right. Come on."

She pulled Karen into the bedroom. When they emerged a half hour later they were clad in identical sweater and skirts. Their hair, which was the same color as the pearls at their throats, was bound in identical pony tails.

Marcy stared. "It's incredible. It's as if you were looking in a mirror, Kriss. Which one are you by the way?"

Kriss stepped forward. Grabbing up a cigarette she asked, "How much longer?"

"The hour won't be up for fifteen minutes," Marcy said looking at her watch.

Kriss inhaled with a kind of desperation. She caught her breath as the doorbell rang. Quickly she snubbed out the cigarette and pulled Karen to the door with her. Then arranging herself beside Karen she motioned Marcy to open the door.

Marcy flung it open and stepped behind it. For what seemed like an eternity Jim stood there silently, staring at the two girls. Then he took a step forward and handed a pair of skates to Kriss. "Here are your skates. I just noticed them this morning. They had slid under the front seat from the back."

Kriss didn't hear a word he said. All she was aware of was that he had handed the skates to her without hesitation. She reached for the skates and her hands brushed his. She grabbed them and held them tightly without knowing she did. Gazing at him, her

heart in her eyes, she whispered, "Jim, how did you know I was Kriss?"

"I could pick you out of a hundred Krisses," he said quietly.

THE NEXT moment she was in his arms, sobbing out the entire story of why she came to New York and how Karen had pretended to be her rather than reveal her secret. His arms tightened about her as he heard her explanation and he let out a long groaning sigh.

"Do you know what I thought? I thought you had some other guy on the string and that you didn't want to go out with me so you sent your twin sister. Sure, I put 2 and 2 together. But I got 5. I remembered you saying you had a sister who looked a lot like you. And the other night when I knew it wasn't you, I added things up. I know every detail of your face, your hands, every lilt of your voice, your walk. I knew that no matter how much this other girl looked like you, she wasn't the girl I loved."

"Oh, Jim." She held her lips up for him to kiss and they clung together joyously.

When Jim drew back he looked around. "Where's your sister?"

Kriss looked and found that Karen and Marcy had disappeared. "Karen," she called.

Her sister peeked around the bedroom door. "Is it safe to come out now?"

"Yes and tell Marcy to come out from wherever she's hiding too."

Marcy followed Karen into the living room. "Looks to me like congratulations are in order," Marcy said gazing from Kriss to Jim.

"Premature," Kriss said tilting her head back so she could see Jim's face.

"I'm asking now," he said grinning.

"The answer is yes."

Jim kissed her and then said to Karen, "I've got a friend down at the office who has been drooling over Kriss' photo. Would you be interested in meeting him or are you sensitive about this carbon copy identity too?"

"Not me," Karen said. "Kriss is the one with the complex."

"Not any more," Kriss said firmly.

"Are you interested then?" Jim asked Karen.

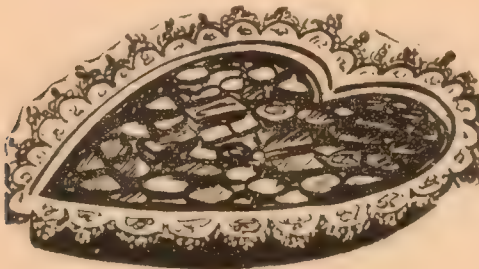
"Definitely," Karen said and glanced at Marcy. "Maybe if it works out I can even move in with Marcy. It looks like she'll be needing a new roommate soon."

"It's O. K. by me," Marcy said. "I won't even know a change has been made only I hope I won't have to go through something like this again." She shuddered with mock horror.

"It turned out all right, though, didn't it?" Jim asked with a grin.

"Wonderfully," Kriss sighed. "Just wonderfully."

THE END





Love Cheat

by
Edith
Jaffa

A girl usually picks the
kind of life she really wants.

"THERE'S nothing in this world I can't have, Laura, if I want it badly enough—and that goes for Hal, too." Nina's voice, cold and clear, echoed in my ears now as I stood reading her note: Hal and I marrying in Washington tonight."

Hal and Nina! It wasn't possible! My blood ran cold as I tried desperately to blot out her image—taunting, unbelievably beautiful, with her head high and her lips slightly curled in a slow, cruel smile. My mind rushed back to all the other times in our childhood when my sister had snatched away the thing I treasured most. It was like some hideous nightmare repeating itself—Hal was the man I had loved and was to have married.

I sank into a chair, too dazed even to cry, as a flood of memories poured into my mind. I remembered the night of my sweet sixteen party when mom found me in the bedroom crying my heart out. I had seen Nina and Paul wander out onto the porch and when they returned I knew it was all over for me—the look on Paul's face was unlike anything I had ever seen. I guess I never forgot the pain and bewilderment of that night—Paul was my first love. Mom must have known how deeply hurt I was for she sat there with me a long time and finally said, "Someday, Laura, you'll meet a fellow—he'll be fine and wonderful and no one will be able to take him from you, no matter how they try."

"Fine and wonderful," the words sang in my heart the night I met Hal. Nina and I were vacationing at the Lake that summer—it was Saturday night and there was a big crowd at the club dance. Nina, as usual, was holding court surrounded by a group of worshipping males. I watched her for a moment as she tossed her head back and laughed. She was breathtaking. Her hair, a flaming copper color, cascaded onto her perfect

shoulders, and as she laughed her gray-green eyes shot glances that completely bewitched every man around her. Nina had a magnetic charm which attracted men and held them spellbound for as long as she wanted. She was exciting, fiery and cool at the same time, passionate but proud with a heart dedicated to Nina alone.

"Dance?" someone said and I suddenly found myself looking up into the nicest eyes I'd ever seen.

There was something about Hal's face that immediately told me he wasn't one of the usual Lake crowd. Perhaps it was the way his skin was pulled too tightly over his cheekbones or the steadiness of his black eyes as they held my gaze. Whatever it was, I warmed to Hal the moment I saw him.

AS WE DANCED Hal told me he'd been watching me from across the room, "I wondered how you got here," he said smiling, "you don't seem to belong."

"That hardly sounds like a compliment," I laughed, close to him now as the orchestra started a slow, nostalgic number, "though I'll admit I must have looked pretty silly standing over there by myself just staring into space."

"You looked like an angel," Hal spoke softly, "suddenly set down on earth—the kind I've dreamed about so many nights alone." Nobody had ever said anything like that to me before and as we swayed, hardly moving to the music, I felt my whole being respond to him—all at once I was thrillingly alive and happy.

"I don't know your name yet," Hal said as the dance ended, but before I could answer someone called, "Hal darling!" and there was Lilah Cullen rushing across the room in a flurry of excitement.

"Where've you been?" she panted,

"everyone is dying to meet you—we've been looking all over." As she spoke I realized that this was her brother who had just returned from Korea and was spending his leave at the Lake. Lilah had talked of nothing else all summer.

"Laura, I know you'll excuse us for a moment," Lilah said tucking her arm through his, "but we've got to show him around—come on Hal!"

"Just a minute, Lilah," Hal's voice was gentle but firm, "I hate to upset the applecart but I'm afraid Laura and I have other plans—we were just leaving."

"Oh?" Lilah's brows went up in amazement as she looked me over coldly, "if that's the case, please don't let me stand in your way." I could see her seething under her cool exterior and for a moment I felt sorry.

"Maybe you ought to let her introduce you to a few people," I said as she marched off in a huff, "she's really been looking forward to this all summer."

"Let's not brood about Lilah—she'll get over it. It's hard for her to realize that there are more important things in the world than her little plans," Hal's voice softened, "Come on let's get out of here anyway—I think there's a place about a mile down the lake where we can dance alone."

We left the club and drove out to a tavern that overlooked the lake. It was small, with a juke box and we danced to slow, dreamy music, talked and laughed until it seemed there had never been a time when we hadn't known each other.

It was almost two when we left. Outside the night was clear and cool and it's dark silence all around us seemed to throb with a strange magic. As we neared the car Hal said, "Laura, I hope you don't think I'm one of those bitter guys who can't take the folks back home after all he's been through—it's just that when I saw you tonight I suddenly realized their

kind of fun wasn't mine anymore—you were like a breath of fresh air entering the room—and my life."

"You hardly know me—and I'm sure you'll find I'm pretty much like they are once you do," I laughed softly, "there's really nothing so awful about that, is there?"

Hal stopped walking and took me by the shoulders, "Let's be serious. Laura, you must know that I'm crazy about you."

"You can't mean that," my voice trembled, "we've just met—we don't know anything about each other."

"I know all I want to know—I know that your eyes are gray and soft and that your voice is the sweetest I've ever heard—that you're completely lovely and my kind of girl—Laura, I'm in love with you and I've never been surer of anything in my life."

I COULDN'T answer, we just stood there looking at each other—then I swayed toward him slightly and we were in each others arms, yielding at last to the passion that had been aching inside of us all night. Hal's kisses, long and searching, burned through my being making me lose all sense of time and place and somewhere out of the darkness was the music of his voice murmuring, "Laura darling, I love you so."

The strength of my own feelings frightened me as I found myself returning his kisses with an ardor I didn't believe possible. Then Hal pushed me from him gently—"We'd better get you home," he laughed huskily.

Driving back close to Hal in the car I kept feeling that everything that had happened tonight was part of some strange, wonderful dream—much too wonderful to ever last. Hal must have guessed my thoughts for as we drove up to the cabin he said, "This is how it's going to be from now on Laura—you and I together."

"I hope so," I whispered, "I love you so much."

The cabin was dark when I entered. I thought Nina was sleeping so I undressed quickly without turning on the light and crept under the covers. Lying still in the darkness I felt the intoxicating sweetness of Hal's love surge through me once more and I was about to drop off to sleep when the light suddenly went on and there was Nina, radiantly beautiful, framed in the doorway.

"Well, when did you blow in?" Nina said, sitting down on the bed and kicking off her pumps. "My shy little sister sure had them buzzing tonight—how'd you manage it?" Nina lit a cigarette—I could see she was bursting with curiosity and was determined to find out just what had happened.

"Let's skip it till the morning—I'm dead," I said, pulling up the covers and turning to the wall. But Nina never could take no for an answer. "So my little sister has made a conquest," she said mockingly "and no other than the much heralded Hal Cullen—whoever would have thought..."

"Why Nina—I believe you're jealous!" I flung at her suddenly confident that nothing she could ever do would destroy the happiness I had now. There was a long, icy silence as Nina finished undressing, switched off the light and got into bed—then like a sharp crack of lightning her voice rang cold and clear across the room, "You know Laura, people are only jealous of things they can't have—and I can *have* Hal any time I want him!"

The assurance in her voice swept cold terror through my veins bringing back all the sickening fear of the past—fear of losing what I loved to Nina. Then I remembered Hal's words, "This is how it's going to be from now on Laura," and forced myself to believe them. "Nothing she does can

hurt me now," I told myself over and over as I dropped off to sleep.

The two weeks that followed were like some miraculous fairy tale. Hal and I were together every day—driving far out into the country for picnics, sailing, strolling along the lake late at night—the world was enchanted and we were discovering it and each other.

ONE EVENING, two days before he was to report back to Washington, Hal asked me to marry him.

"The discharge comes through in a few weeks," he said, "and there's a letter from the firm saying I can have my old job back whenever I want it—so why wait any longer darling," Hal's face was warm against mine, "we're crazy to go on like this, wanting each other so—let's get married right away."

I could feel the pounding of his heart close to mine, "Hal, we've got a lifetime—we can wait a little longer—at least till we're back in the city," I said, thinking of how disappointed mom would be if I got married without her.

"Can we Laura?" Hal's lips sought mine hungrily and I felt myself grow weak with loving him; suddenly nothing mattered but his closeness and his love. I clung to him, returning his kisses, as desire swept through us like a flame. Suddenly I pushed Hal from me with all my strength. It was as if the years of mom's training all at once sprang to the front of my mind forcing out the words, "Hal, I'm sorry, but this all wrong." I watched him anxiously as he lit a cigarette; his face was white and he was breathing heavily, "O. K. Laura," was all he said, but for the first time since I'd known Hal I saw anger in the smoldering blackness of his eyes.

I'll never forget that night—nor the look in Hal's eyes. However, he was sweet and understanding the following

day and I remember I couldn't help feeling that everything was the same between us. We made plans to meet at the lake that afternoon and when I got there I was surprised to find Nina stretched out on the dock with Hal beside her. Nina, in spite of her threat, had kept her distance these past few weeks and, except for an occasional 'Hi,' I'd never even seen her talk to Hal. When I approached the dock Hal jumped up and put his arm around me: "I've been trying to persuade Nina that too much sun isn't good for a redhead," he said smiling. I looked down at my sister, "No one has a right to be that beautiful," I thought. The white satin suit emphasized her golden tan and the slender perfection of her body—she looked like a goddess. I couldn't help wondering whether Hal was comparing my own boyish figure with Nina's.

"Maybe Hal's right," Nina said, as she stood up and began pinning up her hair. "How about a swim?" She looked at me and then let her gaze linger on Hal. I could see her glance take in the hard leanness of his body and then rest on his serious black eyes.

"Go ahead," I said lightly, "I haven't had enough sun yet."

"Nothing doing, I never swim without my girl," Hal laughed, pulling me down beside him on the dock.

We watched Nina dive gracefully into the water and then Hal leaned over and kissed me. "She's quite a gal, your sister," he said: then, seeing the quick look of concern on my face, "but not this guy's dish of tea." We looked out to where Nina was now climbing onto the raft and Hal murmured, almost to himself, "That's poison in a man's blood."

I REMEMBER there was a terrible storm that night—thunder, lightning and torrents of wind-swept rain. Hal and I decided to turn in right af-

ter dinner; I was going to drive him to the station early the next morning. As I lay in bed listening to the rain on the cabin roof, I couldn't help feeling that somehow things would never be the same once we left the Lake. It was as though I were living some enchanted fairy tale and that when I left the spell would be broken. I knew it was ridiculous and that Hal would kid me for letting my imagination run wild—but still the thoughts haunted me. I was about to reach for a magazine to get my mind off the subject when Nina appeared at the door dripping wet.

"What a night," she said, leaving a trail of puddles on her way to the bathroom. I glanced at my watch, "Where've you been—it's nearly two?"

"Out with Johnny, we were caught and had to sit it out at the club." Nina fluffed out her fiery mane with a towel—then tossing the hair out of her eyes she glanced at me and said, "No date tonight?" There was something in her tone that sent the chills up my spine. It seemed to say, as it so often had in our childhood, "I know something I won't tell," which usually meant trouble for me. However I checked my imagination and forced myself to sleep thinking of Hal and the wonderful life we were going to have together.

The next morning when I awoke the sun was streaming in through the windows. I dressed quickly and left the cabin without waking Nina. Hal was to meet me at the clubhouse for coffee before we drove to the train and as I walked along feeling the warmth of the early morning sunlight I wondered how I could have been so silly the night before.

As I approached the clubhouse I saw Hal standing on the porch with his back to me smoking a cigarette. Just the sight of him slouched gracefully against the railing made my heart

skip a beat. "Hal," I called as I came up the stairs. He turned and for a moment I thought he was ill—his face was drawn and there were deep circles under his eyes. "What is it?" I asked anxiously, "are you all right?" Then he spoke and I couldn't believe my ears—it was as if a total stranger was speaking when he said coldly, "We'd better hurry if we're going to catch that train."

"Please, Hal," I pleaded, "if something's wrong I want to know it," icy panic gripped my heart.

"Let's get into the car where we can talk," Hal said and I saw that his hands shook as he lit another cigarette. We got into the car and Hal told me slowly and simply that he wasn't the marrying kind; it had been a wonderful summer but marriage was something else—and that someday I'd find the right guy and be very happy. He looked straight ahead of him as he spoke and I knew he was serious. It was as if the whole world suddenly came crashing down around me—I just sat there too stunned to say anything, then opened the car door and ran, blinded by my tears, back to the cabin.

LOOKING down at the crumpled note in my hand, "*Hal and I marrying in Washington tonight*," I remembered the agony of those next few weeks and the look on mom's face when I told her. I made light of it, but I couldn't fool mom. I'd written her all about Hal while I was away and she knew how I felt. Now I'd have to tell her that it was Nina who had destroyed my happiness—that she was responsible for Hal's leaving me—that she had succeeded again in taking away the man I loved. The pain inside was suddenly more than I could bear. I just buried my face in my hands and cried until there were no tears left—then I made up my mind to forget—to go on as if there had never been a

Hal. "Oh God, please help me," I prayed, "to go on living without him."

During the months that followed I made a tremendous effort to forget Hal. I worked overtime at the office, made dates for the evening as often as I could and though at first it was difficult, gradually I began to get used to the idea that life had to go on without him.

Meeting Jim Nelson at this time was probably the best thing that could have happened to me. Jim was bright and gay with the kind of sunny personality that makes you smile in spite of yourself. We began seeing a lot of each other and I soon found myself laughing and having fun again. I didn't kid myself into thinking I'd forgotten Hal; the pain of loving him was always with me, and often at night I would wake out of a restless sleep sobbing his name. But somehow when I was with Jim things were a lot easier and I found myself eagerly looking forward to our dates together.

Jim never asked any questions, but I knew he was aware of my feelings. "Of all the fish in the sea," he'd say jokingly, "I would have to pick one with a broken heart." When I protested Jim would grow serious, "Don't ever pretend anything you don't feel for my sake Laura, I'm willing to wait and take my chances even if it takes forever."

I knew I wasn't being fair to Jim—nor for that matter to myself either. Why did I have to go on endlessly longing for something I could never have when Jim was right here waiting for me with open arms.

"Jim," I said impulsively one evening, "I'm not pretending now—I want the past to be dead and buried—let's start thinking about us; Jim, I really think we could be very happy together."

Jim was silent—and in that moment before he spoke I found myself regretting what I had said. The picture

flashed through my mind of Jim's gentle kisses becoming possessive, demanding; of Jim's aching love for me at last released from self-control by the virtue of a marriage ceremony, and I knew I couldn't do it. Hal was still too much a part of me. The thought of a thousand intimacies of marriage, shared with someone else, suddenly seemed unbearable. I saw Jim watching me and realized that he had guessed my thoughts.

"I won't hold you to anything Laura," he said, "why don't you think it over a little longer."

"Maybe you're right, Jim," I laughed shakily, the escape had been so close, "I guess I must seem like an awful fool, but at the moment I'm not quite sure of anything."

It was about a week after Jim and I had our talk that I ran into Lilah Cullen. I had been doing a lot of serious thinking about Jim and me. I genuinely liked him—and it was crazy to stay married to a dream that was never to become a reality. The prospect of marriage and a home of my own grew more and more inviting. Nina and I never had a real home after dad died and mom was forced to go out and work. Mom did her best to fix up the furnished apartment in the city but none of us could ever get used to its drab loneliness. Why shouldn't I marry Jim and have all the things I'd always longed for, I thought to myself one morning on the way to the office, I can't go on being a 'career' girl forever. I stopped to admire a kitchen display in one of the department store windows when somebody grabbed my arm, "Laura Sayers," she cried, "of all people—imagine running into you like this!" It was Lilah, Hal's sister.

I WAS A BIT taken back by her greeting. Lilah and I had never been too friendly and after the incident at the club we had hardly spoken. It seemed odd that she was so delighted to see me now.

"Laura, how about lunch—there's something I want to talk to you about," Lilah spoke hurriedly, "we can't stand here and gab—I'll meet you at Louis'; twelve thirty O.K.?"

Before I knew what I was saying I'd agreed, and off she dashed leaving me standing there in dumb amazement. I spent the rest of the morning trying to figure out what she wanted to talk about and when twelve thirty rolled around I left the office with an anxious feeling in the pit of my stomach.

Lilah had already taken a table when I got to the restaurant. "Isn't this cozy?" she said as I slid in beside her, "I got here a little early so we wouldn't have to spend hours on line."

We ordered and then Lilah couldn't hold back any longer, "Did you know Hal and Nina were getting a divorce?" she exclaimed.

"Divorce!" I gasped, unable to hide my surprise. I hadn't heard anything from Nina, except for a few postcards she'd sent mom from Washington saying they liked it there and planned to stay awhile. Now with Lilah watching me like a hawk to see my reaction I found it difficult to control the swift current of emotion that swept through me at the thought of Hal being free again. "I didn't know," I said quietly, "I'm sorry to hear it."

"Sorry!" Lilah cried, "why it's the best news I've heard all year. You don't mean to sit there and tell me you didn't know how miserable Hal has been since he got roped into marrying your sister."

"Just a minute Lilah," I said, wishing now that I had never come, "you know as well as I do that Hal isn't the kind of guy to get roped into anything," my voice broke, "and if you don't mind I'd rather not discuss this any further."

"You're really more naive than I thought," Lilah said, lowering her voice to a whisper, "suppose I let you

in on a little secret: Hal wanted to marry you, until Nina met him one night out at the Lake and told him that you weren't really all that you pretended to be; that you wanted to marry him because you were tired of running around. Of course he didn't believe her at first, but you know that Nina can be pretty convincing. Hal told me later that he walked for hours in the rain that night, struggling with his doubts..."

"He told you about—about what Nina had said?" I broke in.

"Nina told me," Lilah corrected, "Hal spoke to me about it later. He admitted to me then that he'd proposed to Nina right away, almost out of spite. He blamed himself bitterly, but even a sphinx couldn't resist Nina once she set her cap for him," Lilah was saying. "Why Laura you're as white as a sheet!" Lilah stopped short, "are you ill—can I get you something?"

"I'll be all right as soon as I get some air," I said, looking around for the waiter, "it must be the heat in this place." The waiter brought our check and I apologized to Lilah for having to rush off. I could see her mind working as she watched me collect my bag and gloves, "why the little fool is still in love with my brother," she was probably thinking.

"Laura, before you go, may I ask you something?" Lilah said, looking at me intently, "please don't be angry, but would you see Hal again—if I arranged it?"

"See Hal again! why—what for?" I could control myself no longer, the words burst from me like sobs, "How can you ask me that, Lilah—is this some sort of game you're playing? Whatever it is you have in mind now I'm not interested!"

"I don't blame you Laura, and I guess I owe you an apology," there was a sincerity in Lilah's tone that I had never heard before. "I love my

brother, and though we were never very close I always knew the things he felt deeply about. I know now that he loved you very much—and that he still does." Lilah's voice became urgent, "You know what kind of a guy Hal is—he's paid for this a hundred times. Laura, you've got to see him!"

What could I do?—It was hard not to believe Lilah, or perhaps I wanted to more than anything in the world. Whatever the reason, all my resolve melted at that moment and I said yes, I'd see him. Lilah immediately made a date for the following Friday. She was having some people over to her apartment for cocktails; Hal was in town, and would be there.

I CAN STILL remember every detail of our meeting that afternoon as if it were yesterday. I was the last to arrive and when I walked in Lilah's guests had already warmed up considerably; there was a great deal of laughter and the air was filled with a faint odor of martinis. Hal was standing across the room and when he turned and our eyes met it was as if the past suddenly melted away and time stood still—nobody existed in that moment but Hal and me.

"What kept you so long, I'd given you up," Lilah said, descending on me with a tray of canapes, "Here let me get you a drink—we're way ahead of you."

I followed her over to where the drinks were and then Hal was at my side. "Hello Laura," was all he said but when I looked up there were tears in his eyes.

"Hal, it's so nice to see you," the words sounded hollow—but it didn't matter—somehow nothing mattered now that we'd found each other again. I glanced over to where Lilah was watching us and saw her come over.

"Look, if you two want to disappear—go right ahead," Lilah laughed,

"This time I promise not to get angry."

"How about it Laura?" There was an uncertainty in Hal's voice that melted my heart completely; I nodded.

We left Lilah's and started walking toward the park. There was a children's merry-go-round rattling out an old-time tune, and as I listened it made me think of Jim. We had taken a couple of rides one day when I'd been in the dumps; Jim said it was the best cure he knew for the blues—and he'd been right. We bought some popcorn and fed the pigeons that afternoon too and I remember the prize at the bottom of the package—an imitation gold ring that Jim said was destiny and made me wear all afternoon.

"Laura, this must have been pretty awful for you," Hal's voice broke through my thoughts. "I'm not asking you to forget anything but if there's a chance for us again I've got to know—Laura, I've never stopped loving you."

Funny, how you wait for something so long—pray for it with all your heart, and then when it happens you no longer want it. I listened to Hal holding my breath, waiting for his words to start the old fire in my veins—but nothing happened. Somehow all I could think of was the merry-go-round with its tinkly tune and that crazy afternoon with Jim. I looked up and for the first time I saw Hal as he really was. Why, for all his charm he was just like me—or at least the way I'd been—too weak to stand up on his own two feet and live his own life. We'd both been bullied unmercifully by Nina. I must have been insane to have let him haunt me all this time!

"Your thoughts are showing," Hal said with a smile, "is there someone else Laura?"

I hesitated, looking straight into the searching black eyes that had once stirred the very depths of my being, and suddenly I knew—there *was* someone else. A guy with the sweetest smile

and the most honest blue eyes in the whole world. I could hardly hold back the smile of pure joy at my discovery as I said, happiness ringing in my voice, "Yes Hal, there is."

It had ended as simply as that—all the passion and longing and pain—it was all gone and suddenly, like a burst of sunlight, I knew that I loved Jim. Yes, it was a different kind of love; there were no butterflies in my stomach—no whirling in my brain. It was a love built on confidence and trust; a deep sense of belonging to someone who needed you above all and was willing to put everything aside to make you happy. That was how Jim loved me and how I had learned to love him. I hadn't realized in all those months of seeing him that I was learning the meaning of real love—learning slowly and surely that this was the man I wanted to share my life.

Now, five years later, Jim and I have found true happiness. We have

two adorable children and a home, far more wonderful than anything I'd ever dreamed of. For mom's sake we see Nina occasionally, but I can honestly say now that I neither admire nor fear her—she no longer holds any interest for me. She's married to a very wealthy man, a lot older than she. Nina picked the kind of life she wanted and I guess it makes a lot more sense to her than our kind of happiness; although something happened just the other day to make me wonder. We were all visiting mom, and Jim and I and the kids were having a wild romp together on the living room floor. I glanced up, my face flushed with laughter and happiness and looked straight into Nina's eyes. They had the most peculiar expression—one I'd never seen there before. Could it have been envy? Or was it just something she couldn't understand—a love, a happiness that no one could destroy.

Inside Tip On How to Keep Ahead of the Times

Were you amazed when you first heard about radar, read about the atomic bomb, saw your first television show, learned about Earth satellites?



Well, there's one group of people who weren't! True, they didn't know exactly *when* these marvels would come about — but they knew such things would happen.



Who were these people — scientists? Politicians with an inside track? Military experts? Perhaps some of them were — but most were ordinary laymen like you and I, except that they were devotees of science fiction.

Don't be a back number — it's fun to be hep on tomorrow — and you'll enjoy reading

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

The September issue is now on sale at all stands

CONVINCE THE MAN

by Abigail Dixon

Jack just didn't seem to believe anything that Molly
told him ...

MOLLY PUT her hands over her ears and pressed them hard. If that pounding in the studio apartment over her head didn't stop immediately she'd start screaming.

For one hour and forty-three minutes this incessant pounding had been going on; no one should have to endure such horror. Molly took her hand away from over her left ear and shook it at her ceiling; the radiator clashed and banged again as though defying her with laughter.

Now, look, Molly told herself. I'm a fairly patient soul, but I'm through. A human being, she reasoned fiercely, can stand just so much clanging before her ear drum broke. Certainly they *could* break with this pandemonium cracking down over your head.

She strode to her dressing room, that was the little square behind her living room; and slashed lipstick on her soft lips. She dusted powder on her nose and gave her tawny hair a couple of good extra brushes. Then she tightened the belt of her gray-green slacks with

a jerk. Her dark eyes were purposeful and grim.

Molly climbed the stairs with determination. Like millions of other New Yorkers she had no idea who her neighbors were. Until this evening she'd assumed they were people. She'd lived in this old reconverted house in the east Fifties for sixteen months and had managed to speak only to her landlady with a few nods of her head on her way to work. She didn't know, nor did she care who her next door or upstairs neighbors might be. Until this evening, that was; now, this banshee above her was going to know her, but fast.

A neat green door with a cute black cat iron knocker almost made Molly smile, but she remembered the horrible pounding of the last couple of hours in the nick of time. She pounded then, a rapid boom-boom-boom.

"Yes?" a harassed looking young man questioned as he flung open the door. He was in brown slacks with a dirtier blue smock, paint streaked. His

black hair was up on end and his dark eyes were flinty. "Yes?" he repeated ungraciously.

"For one hour and forty-seven minutes now, you've managed to drive me completely mad with your radiator cacophony. Haven't you the decency even to think about your neighbors. Oh," Molly hastened on as she saw laughter dance up into his eyes, "I realize it is very, very funny to you, but it has been stark bedlam to me. People who inhabit apartments in the crowded city of New York should have some semblance of courtesy to..."

"Come in," he grinned as he stepped out of the doorway, "Let's go right into conference."

SHE STILL stood there glowering at him, furious. Her head was splitting and it was this person's fault. But he didn't stand on ceremony; he took hold of her wrist and jerked her inside, then slammed the door. He continued to grin, a fabulous grin that made Molly want to purr. The influence of his black cat on the door, no doubt.

His studio was larger than hers, the north side of his high-ceilinged room a tremendous window. Canvases were stacked, their faces to the walls, his easel perched in the corner.

"Sit down please; you look tired." He waved toward a delapidated chair.

It was his grin that did it, Molly always told herself afterwards. She couldn't quite cope with the charm of it, so she sat down in the shabby old comfortable chair. "Well," she said inanely and wished she weren't the weak type for this particular man. "Well," she repeated and recalled something in her childhood about, "Well, well, well, the old oaken bucket." Which didn't help.

"Cigarette?" he asked solicitously and when she thanked him and said yes, he said, "Do you happen to have one?"

Before Molly thought, she reached into the pocket of her slacks and drew

out a fresh pack. "Thank you," he smiled as he opened them. He shook one out and handed it to her, after meticulously tapping it first.

Molly kept looking at him against her will. He sat on a low stool looking up at her, his long legs stuck out in front of him. He was thin, he was tall and, she thought derisively, he even had hair. So had a million other men, a fair proportion of whom she'd always been able to take in her stride. She didn't even know what he was like; all she knew for sure was that, whatever he was, she was liking him.

She tried to analyze his terrific attraction and couldn't. Maybe it was the deep laughter in his eyes; maybe it was the way he pushed his hair back; maybe the way he grinned, or his very cheap cooking sherry. How does a girl know when she's in the throes of that first impact of personality and attraction?

"My name is Jack Winslow and if you'll tell me yours, we can be old friends."

"Molly Kemp and we shall never be old friends. You," she said remembering the incessant pounding, "have no consideration for other people."

Jack threw back his head and laughed. "Child, you're beautiful and lovely, but not too bright. I was not pounding above your ear; it's some fiend above me, so how about forgetting you're mad and agreeing to pose for me? Look," he moved from the stool quickly with beautiful coordination; when he came back he knelt by the side of her chair. His dark eyes burned with his enthusiasm and Molly found herself wishing that she could watch them burn that way with some enthusiasm over her. Which was utterly silly. "Look," he repeated and showed her the sketches in his hand.

They were interesting and showed great talent, she leaned toward him to see them better. "These are your sketches for magazine illustrations, aren't they?"

"Right. I have a chance to illustrate a serial for a big circulation magazine. If the Art Director likes these the job's in the bag and Jack on his way to that old fame and fortune." He drew a deep breath and let it out slowly; she knew what it meant to him. Everything about him showed his eager desire for this job and in spite of herself and his pounding, Molly wanted him to have it. "This is my real break, my first since I got out of the Army. If I get it; I must have you to pose for me. You've the life, the vitality, the beauty I want. Why, Honey, you're what I dreamed up all by myself. Here," he pulled her to her feet.

"I am not posing for you, period," there was finality in her voice. She could imagine what Hunt would think if she posed for anyone else. It was funny how illustrators seemed to clutter up her life; this one was already practically in her tawny hair.

Jack put a golf club in her hand and without thinking Molly took her stance and began wiggle-wagging the club. "Honey," Jack yelled happily, "that's it. All we need for that one is to muss up your hair, like the wind had played tag in it, put you into a blue flannel sport dress instead of those pants and I've got it."

HE TOOK the club out of her hands and put it back in his golf bag. "Come on, we'll have another sherry to celebrate my good fortune in finding you."

"Now, just see here," Molly drew in a long breath and felt the warm color start to pour into her face. She was getting mad. Did this big ape think that he could just push her here and pull her there, sticking clubs into her hands at will, and then take it for granted that her life's work was suddenly to be his model? Well! She mentally rolled up her sleeves. "I am not in the least interested in your work. I do not wish any more sherry. I do

wish, however, you'd promise like a gentleman not to pound any more on your radiator. I have to get up in the morning to go to work."

"You're cute as a bug," he beamed down at her. "Try to remember, honey, what is making you so mad so we can get just that same sparkle in your pretty eyes. And to think you live right under me." He put his arm around her and drew her close to him. Before she could struggle out of his grasp, he leaned down and kissed her lightly. By its very lightness it was an insult and Molly wasn't accustomed to men kissing her in the manner of a maiden aunt. She wanted to slap him hard, so hard he'd have red faced remembrance of her for a nice long time. But she couldn't. She just couldn't do anything about so unimportant a kiss except seeth inside.

"Good-night," she tried to keep the anger out of her voice. "And *please* stay away from that radiator."

"But it wasn't I. It was some one upstairs." He leaned on the front door and his dark eyes smiled at her. "Dinner tomorrow night."

"Definitely not. And you needn't lie about your hammering; I detest liars."

"Good-night," he said pleasantly and closed the door. The pounding began again with a fine big clash and clang.

Fury shook Molly and she yelled at the top of her lungs at him. "Will you stop that racket! It is heathenish. STOP IT, you fiend!"

On the floor above a door opened and a soft feminine voice called down apologetically, "I'm so sorry. I was trying to get some heat. I didn't mean to disturb you."

Molly murmured some sort of apology and sneaked down the stairs, she could hear Jack's gay laughter chasing her. Of course it wouldn't be he after she'd succeeded in making a complete fool of herself. Probably Jack even thought she'd used the racket as an excuse to meet him. Her face really was burning now and she wished she'd

never seen him; she had a faint suspicion that he might prove too disturbing to her.

Chapter 2

AT THE advertising agency the next day nothing seemed to go right for Molly. She turned in some soap copy and had it washed right back at her with a mild suggestion that she expend more effort. She dropped her watch and mislaid her favorite pencil.

Finally she broke her dinner engagement for that night with Hunt, not knowing why she did it. She liked Hunt; he was smooth, sophisticated, and one of the best illustrators in New York. They had gone around together for enough months now so that their friends were beginning to look at them coyly and make pointed suggestions about houses in the country. She'd always had fun with him, probably because neither of them had ever wanted it to develop into a big howling romance.

It was after six when Molly climbed off the bus and walked to her apartment. She was calling herself all varieties of a dumb bunny when she went into the delicatessen to get a can of soup. What she needed tonight was certainly not to be alone, what she needed was to get dressed and go out and be gay. She'd had the chance and turned it down, so soup it was.

Molly saw Jack then, leaning on a counter peering delightedly at the cheeses, and her heart defied her with its nip-ups. She liked the way he wore his gray tweeds, she liked the maroon tie. He wasn't wearing a hat and for a wild impulsive moment Molly wondered what it would be like to run her fingers through his black hair. She'd never been exactly the type who wanted to run her fingers through men's hair, but it seemed to be catching up on her now.

She turned to a counter and was

making a deep study of soup when he came up to her. "Hello. Turtle's nice," he chuckled, "Still mad?"

He made her feel unsure of herself, she who never had been unsure in her life. "Yes," she smiled, "I'm furious."

"You look beautiful when your dark eyes flash. I think I like you mad." He looked at her closely and frankly studied her features. "Yes," he nodded and seemed exceedingly pleased, "I do like you mad. I've an elegant can of baked beans and some odoriferous cheese, will you dine with me?"

SHE DETESTED beans and cheese, but she found herself grinning and eagerly accepting his invitation. The idea was to see more of him so she'd snap into it and stop thinking he was something quite special. It was the safe and sane procedure. Gracious, she couldn't go mooning around about a stranger like an addlepatented adolescent. Of course not.

"May I contribute my soup?" Molly laughed with him for no reason whatsoever, except that she suddenly felt very carefree and happy.

"Only turtle which we'll lace with that fine old sherry," his nice eyes twinkled down at her.

It was the worst and most delightful dinner of Molly's life. She felt a small persistent tinge of fear around her heart because any girl who could eat baked beans and relish them had plenty of cause for fear. His charm sort of wrapped itself around her and her heart felt warm.

They talked of many things and it was thrilling to go exploring with him into their likes and dreams and thoughts. He made her understand the necessity of landing this job because his cash available was running out and unless this broke the right way, he'd have no excuse not to take a position he hated. He didn't explain it any more than that, but Molly understood. He believed in people doing the things they wanted most to do because then

their work was fun. She hadn't thought of it just that way, but now she realized, with amazement, that her own work was fun.

When she finished her coffee he took the cup and then lifted her to her feet. "You have to run home now, honey. I've a lot of work to do and you'd distract me." His eyes intent upon hers, were serious with no hint of laughter in their depths. "That's a compliment in case you didn't know. Curl up with a good book," he grinned, "and improve your mind."

"I," Molly answered with dignity, "shall concentrate on soap. My copy wasn't exactly hot today. Dinner was something I'll remember. Thanks, Jack."

At the door he leaned down and kissed the tip of her nose. "Night," he said softly and stood watching as she ran lightly down the stairs.

She closed the door of her apartment and stood there leaning back against it. Her heart was pounding and it wasn't from running down any stairs. Her throat felt tight. After a while she went over to the big deep couch and threw herself face down on it. She'd never done anything like this in her twenty-four years, but then she'd never felt quite this way either. She remembered all the things she'd ever heard about being in love and knew, wryly, that she had all of them.

"I love Jack," she whispered and the big room caught the words and seemed to fling them back at her from every corner. They beat into her mind, over and over.

Molly knew that Jack wasn't in the least in love with her; this thing that had hit her and lifted her right off her firm little feet hadn't even touched him. Jack wouldn't laugh at her, wouldn't kiss the tip of her nose and tell her to go read a book, if it had.

"Oh, double damn," she said out loud. Molly was not one to include "unrequited" in her vocabulary. Nothing, she knew, would become her less

than to have her heart smash up. Sure, love could be wonderful, but only if two carried on with it.

She talked to herself sternly. She'd only seen Jack twice so he couldn't possibly matter to her. You just didn't fall in love with your first glance at someone. She tried hard not to listen when her heart mocked her. Oh, so all right. She'd make it simple and just not see him again; it had never paid out to stick your neck out.

That definitely decided, Molly felt better, got up and put on some lipstick. She sat down at her desk and concentrated on soap. And, surprisingly, ideas began to crowd out Jack. She was finishing what she knew was really hot copy, when someone knocked at her door. Try as Molly would, she couldn't stop the gloriously thrilling idea that it might be Jack.

"Oh, Hunt," she sounded astonished even to herself, and disappointed. He caught it and raised one eyebrow quizzically.

"May I come in?" he smiled at her.

Molly smiled back, "Naturally." She watched him take off his coat and white muffler. He was startlingly good looking in his white tie and tails and she realized that Hunt was the only blond man she'd ever seen who didn't look silly with his thin little mustache.

"Feeling better?" he asked as he snapped open his cigarette case and offered it to her.

"It was just that I was in a vile humor and wouldn't be good tonight for man or beast. Forgive me for letting you know so late I didn't want to go." Her conscience hurt her and she was ashamed that she'd treated him so preemptorily. He was much too nice for her ever to treat shabbily. "Let me get you a brandy."

"I'd like it," he held his lighter for her cigarette and smiled, "I really happen to need it, Molly. I'm about to do something I've never tried before and I think I'm a little scared."

SHE FELT a slight chill of apprehension and told herself that she was seeing hobgoblins in every thing under the sun tonight. But her hand trembled and she spilled some when she poured the brandy. He undoubtedly was going to give her a friendly lecture about something, but what?

Hunt waited until she was sitting again in the big chair, then he raised his glass. "To you," he said quietly. He sipped it, set his glass on the mantle and stood in front of her. He was paler than usual and someplace he'd managed to mislay a little of his poise. As though he'd read her mind, he smiled again. "I told you this is new for me and I expect I shall bungle it like a ham actor. Molly, I've come to ask if you'll marry me."

Molly hoped her mouth didn't actually pop open. This was the last thing in the world she'd ever expected from Hunt. He was a confirmed bachelor and had always given plenty of evidence of loving that state. Fate, she thought, plays such cute ironic little tricks. That Hunt would pick this one night, the night she'd admitted to herself that she'd fallen in love for the first time, to ask her to marry him was indeed ironic.

"Hunt, I," she tried to think what to say to him. Last night she might have wanted to marry him, but this was another night and her heart had come alive.

"Molly," he smiled at her, "let's dispense with all the 'this is so sudden' sort of dialogue. I've been thinking about us together for a long time. I don't flatter myself that you are violently in love with me," she hoped that he hadn't noticed that she'd winced at his use of violent, it so accurately described her state, "but I know that we could make a good marriage together." Hunt warmed to his subject, "Darling, we like the same things, we think the same way, we know the same people. . . ."

She hated herself for giggling be-

cause she saw instantly that she had offended him. "I'm terribly sorry, but there seemed to suddenly be an awful lot of sameness about things. We have had fun together, it's just that I—I wonder if that's enough."

"That is the only sensible basis for a good marriage." Then he noticed the expression of doubt on her face and looked at her more intently. "Molly, a week ago you agreed with me on all of this. You agreed that being madly in love probably would only cause havoc in two lives until that mad love calmed down. But you don't still agree, do you?"

"I'm not sure that I do. I, well I. . . ."

"Have you fallen in love," he interrupted sharply. "Have you met someone who has begun to make you feel that nothing is important but love?" He watched her and when she stared into the empty fireplace and didn't answer, he snapped open his cigarette case. "I see," he said bitterly, "you *have* met someone else and for the moment you're forgetting everything you've always believed in. I'm not asking who it is; we could be happy and I am not giving you up, Molly."

She reached up and took his hand. "Please," she told him softly, "I'm mixed up, let me think things out. I do care about you, Hunt; it's just that I have to be sure we want the same things."

"That you want them, you mean." He folded his muffler carefully around his neck and slid into his topcoat. "I'm going now. It isn't quite as I planned it," he said ruefully. "I'll call you at the office tomorrow." He walked over to her, "Remember, I want you to marry me and I know we'll be happy."

"I'm sorry I can't be perfectly sure." She watched him close the door quietly and realized how completely inadequate she'd been. She'd handled it so badly it must be because her mind was upset

about the realization of her love for Jack. Or was it her heart?

Chapter 3

FOR THE next three days Molly stuck to her resolution not to see Jack. She was working particularly hard and Hunt somehow found time to be waiting to take her to lunch each day and waiting to take her to cocktails and dinner each night. He said nothing more to her about their marriage, nor did he mention anyone else whom she'd met; he just made sure that she found time only for him. If her heart hadn't resembled a shredded pineapple at the thought of Jack, she would have found Hunt's sudden persistence quite entertaining.

On the afternoon of the fourth day Hunt telephoned that he'd be tied up for dinner with an Art Director and a writer whose story he was going to illustrate. For a moment Molly played with the idea of asking him if he couldn't put in a good word for Jack because he surely could use additional contacts, then decided against it. Hunt would know too surely that Jack was the one who was making the difference. One artist at a time was difficult enough to handle, she was discovering; two of them at once might develop atomic proclivities.

She saw Jack's light when she got home and felt suddenly numb. Must her knees, she wondered, turn to jelly just because a man had on his light? If he ever took her in his arms and really kissed her, she supposed she'd turn in a good old fashioned swoon. But Molly couldn't quite laugh herself out of the way she felt.

She had taken her shower and had put on dark blue slacks and a soft white sweater when she heard the thumping in the radiator. This she couldn't stand tonight; she actually would scream if the girl on the top floor didn't stop. Then she listened more carefully because this wasn't the

same thump, crash, bang variety of the other evening, this was softer and had a definite rhythm. It must be Jack in a playful mood; she determined to ignore it, but her heart kept time.

After a while it seemed to Molly that there was a sort of urgency about the taps. Maybe Jack had slipped and broken his ankle. Maybe he'd cracked a rib. Maybe he was suffering so he could only crawl over to the radiator. She convinced herself that he was calling to her in a dire emergency.

Molly flew up the stairs.

A red-nosed, grumpy looking Jack opened the door. "I've been tapping for you," he said accusingly.

"Are you seriously hurt," Molly tried to keep the fright out of her voice, she tried not to let it squeak with her worry. She saw that he was in one piece and could walk. "Why, you aren't hurt the least little bit," she was indignant.

"I have a cold," he glared at her, "A fever, a sore throat. Here, just put your hand on my head if you don't believe me."

He was burning up and instantly she was contrite and worried again. She made up his bed and ordered him into it while she ran down for fruit juice and to call her doctor. She left him protesting feebly that he'd stay on his feet and found him glad he'd given in and crawled into bed.

THE DOCTOR looked slightly somber about Jack's temperature while he wrote prescriptions and gave instructions to Molly. For the next couple of days, with the help of the landlady, she managed to take care of him. She explained to everyone at the office, and to Hunt, that she was taking care of a sick friend. She left the office early and she might have just as well stayed home herself for all the work she turned out, but she couldn't stop worrying about him.

While he was in the clutches of the flu he was a model patient, but Molly

knew to the moment when he began to get well. Jack fussed and fumed about his sketches for the serial; they had to be approved and he hadn't finished them. He fumed and fussed about staying in, about drinking orange juice about the beef broth.

And still she loved him more and more. If you can manage to do that with a man who's fuming and irascible, then you might as well give up and accept the inevitable, she decided. She knew that this was all on her part, that apparently to him she was just someone who poked orange juice at him and stood there until he drank it. She knew she had a one way ticket to heartbreak, and couldn't help it. When he was well, she kept telling herself, she'd take stock of the situation and do something drastic about it. It wasn't her fault he got sick, was it?

When Molly dashed up the stairs she found Jack dressed and sitting up. He'd set the low table and looked up at her defiantly. "I'm well. Our landlady has roasted me a fine fat chicken and so we're feasting to celebrate my recovery." He grinned at her and her heart began to rattle. He took her hand and pressed it gently to his lips. "You've been wonderful, Molly, thanks."

"I'm just glad you're well again," she sounded gay. So, now, he was well and she'd have to find some way to keep her heart intact, to keep him from guessing how she felt. Well, you don't want him to be an invalid, do you? For shame.

"Will you heat things up, honey? Then hurry back, I've news for you," his low voice held a lovely intimacy. Why Molly thought and felt like a fool, it's almost like being married to him. But it wasn't really and she still had sense enough left to know it.

To play it safe until she was sure she had her silly emotions under control, she rattled around in Jack's little kitchenette. She smiled when she

heard his impatient, "Hey, honey, come on in here."

"Yell it out to me. I'm busy."

"Bosh and tush," but when she didn't go in to him, he did yell. "Monday at noon I have a date with my Art Director and that will tell the big story. Excited?"

She was terribly. "No," she called back, "not in the least."

"You're a fine, nasty hussy, and if I'd suspected, I wouldn't be sharing my feast with you."

SITTING across from him with low candles flickering on the table, she grinned. Baked beans or roast chicken it was the same gay fun with him. It was just as well, Molly thought ruefully, that love hadn't exploded in her heart before if it went like this; at least, for most of her twenty-four years she hadn't been a jittering idiot.

There was a sharp knock on the door and Jack raised a questioning eyebrow and Molly shrugged her slim shoulders to indicate that she had no idea who it might be either. "Why don't you go find out," she whispered.

"An excellent idea," he grinned back and as he passed her chair his hand rested for a brief moment on her tawny hair.

Molly watched the door with interest. She saw the gorgeously smooth girl standing there with a faint amused smile on her red, red lips for Jack's kiss. The girl in her lovely furs, with her golden hair flowing down like wheat in the sunshine, was reason enough why Jack had not felt the same heart shock that Molly had. Well, she thought, this is just about where I came in.

Jack was beaming happily at them both as he put his arm around the girl's shoulder. "This is a beautiful surprise, Kit, and I want you two to know each other." He introduced them and stood there like a proud parent totally unaware of the sparking tension between them. Kit made no effort

to hide her immediate dislike for Molly and that was all right, too.

"Molly," Jack went on gayly, "has been taking care of me. She jerked me over the flu with her orange juice."

"How wonderfully kind," Kit's smile was brittle. "Do you live here, too?" Molly explained that she had the downstairs studio and Kit looked her over more appraisingly before she turned to Jack. "Darling, when are you going to give up this ridiculous farce and come back home where you belong?"

"To the bottle works?" he grinned that so charming grin and Molly felt maybe she might melt. "My father, Molly, is a sort of bottle baron in Chicago and Kit is his best persuader to come home now. You can't really see me making bottles, can you now?"

"But I met you as an artist," she laughed with him and it sounded a little hollow, "so it's hard for me to make the transition. Bottles are nice though."

"Oh, exceedingly," he agreed and his eyes danced at her.

"I seem to be outnumbered—for the moment," Kit's blue eyes were cold. "I'm at the Plaza, Jack. Will you call me tomorrow?"

"Naturally. We'll do the town. The funds are at an low ebb, so I promise you it'll be different."

"With you it won't matter, darling. I must run. If I don't see you again, Molly, it's nice to have met you." Kit made it perfectly clear that Molly got the full impact of her lingering good-bye kiss and of Jack's confusion. "I've a cab waiting and I don't want you to climb back those horrible stairs when you've been ill, darling."

MOLLY WAITED until Jack closed the door before she began carrying things to the kitchen. Keep busy until she could get out of here was the thing to do. Somewhere she'd read something like that and had wondered if it worked. Well, this was the time to find out.

"Please turn on the coffee," Jack called pleasantly, but firmly. "I've Grand Marnier to go with it. I told you this was a feast."

She brought in the coffee and knew she had to say something about Kit, so she plunged. "Kit is terribly attractive, isn't she?"

"Ummmm," he nodded as he concentrated on stirring his coffee. "Spoiled though. She has me cast as a miniature bottle baron; she's an expensive wench." When Molly didn't say anything, he looked across into her dark eyes. "I honestly forgot to tell you about it, about Kit. I can't quite explain, but somehow I feel that we know each other, that you know everything there is about me. If I land this illustrating job it will change a lot of things and I'll have a lot to say."

"She is most attractive," Molly contributed and thought the words had a faintly familiar ring. Before Jack could answer that smart remark, there was another knock at the door and Molly got up quickly. "I really must run along. It's been a lovely feast. And all luck, Jack."

But Jack had opened the door. Molly gasped and knew for sure she must be whirling on a merry-go-round because standing there, suave and impeccably dressed, was Hunt. Their pasts were catching up with them and it suddenly struck Molly funny and she laughed.

After she'd introduced them and Jack had enthusiastically told Hunt how he admired his work and had given him coffee and Grand Marnier, Hunt caught her eye and smiled ruefully. "I met Jack's fiancée as I was tapping on your door, Molly. She told me you were up here so I came on up. She's gorgeous, Jack."

Jack nodded and smiled, "She's quite a lovely."

"Jack," Molly said, "why don't you show Hunt your sketches? He might have some suggestions."

Jack's face reddened for a moment,

[Turn To Page 86]

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A million times better than sulphuric acid... 400% more economical, more efficient in blistering heat... NOW OUR TRUCKS ENJOY FASTER STARTING, BRIGHTER LIGHTS AND BETTER OPERATION OF ALL ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT!

L. S., National Mover Co.
Miami, Florida

Have used "VX/6" in all batteries for over three years NOT ONE SINGLE BATTERY FAILURE YET! NOW OUR TRUCKS ENJOY A SAVINGS OF THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS FOR A BIG FLEET SUCH AS OURS.

A. S., Mechanics Overall Service
Miami, Florida

Most of the batteries traded in are "weak" or "dead". But "VX/6" TURNED OLD BATTERIES INTO NEW BATTERIES! NOT ONE REPLACEMENT YET! IT'S AMAZING!

B. S., Dial Motors
Miami, Florida

Over 30,000,000 batteries

went dead in traffic in 1956!

It's a true fact—as you can easily find out. Imagine! Over thirty million cars "stopped dead" in heavy traffic... in the middle of bridges... in tunnels... on speed highways! Whole weekends were ruined! Families stood shivering by the roadside while the driver had to walk to put in an emergency call for a tow truck. Thousands of others had to flag down cars and taxis and offer ten dollars or more for a push! Still others were killed on highways trying to get the car started! Play safe—pour a little "VX/6" in each battery cell and you can have complete peace of mind... for years to come.

No matter how old your battery cell is... you can take cross-country trips, travel over steaming deserts, plough through snow... leave your car standing in the rain—YET YOUR BATTERY WILL ALWAYS TURN OVER THE VERY INSTANT YOU TOUCH THE STARTER BUTTON... 27 times a day for the life of your car with amazing "VX/6" to safeguard you!

World-famed Reader's Digest tells the astonishing story.

Yes, the Reader's Digest released the exciting story of how a battery can last longer than the life of a car! It tells how the battery is every motorist's greatest headache. If left unattended, it dies. If it gets low in subzero weather, it is likely to crack. It usually has to be replaced every year-and-a-half! Yet now you can have a battery that runs 10 years or more! Now you can have the same lifetime power as an expensive nickel-cadmium battery famous the world over... simply by pouring in a little "VX/6" into each cell!

Public Service Laboratory tests with "VX/6"

PROCEDURE: A discarded Delco 6 Volt battery was used for the following tests. History of this battery indicated that it had failed in use and was unable to hold a charge.

I. We added "VX/6" and charged the battery.

II. Battery was installed on 1935 Ford With lights and radio on and ignition off. Self starter was run until battery was so run down, lights would not function or starter turn over. After less than two minutes with lights turned off battery started car motor with a surge of power regained during brief 90 second interval.

III. Battery was subjected to 40°F below zero temperature for a continuous 24 hour period. Tests after 24 hours indi-



icated ability to instantly start motor and operate electrical system at full efficiency. No loss of voltage occurred.

IV. Battery was subjected to an even temperature of 160°F. No loss of electrolyte solution or power was indicated by test, and ability to perform starting and electrical functions remained at full rated efficiency.

V. After treating battery with "VX/6" and restoring power, 25% increase in light brightness was noted.

With "VX/6" in your battery you will find improvements you never expected!

1. Your headlights are 25% brighter.
2. Check your battery—will show higher terminal voltage.
3. Car starts immediately—time after time.
4. Extra reserve of power for radio, heater, etc.
5. Your battery recuperates its power faster.
6. Strong enough to start in sub-normal cold or heat!

TAKE THIS 2-SECOND BATTERY CHECK RIGHT NOW! DELAYS ARE COSTLY!

Open the hood of your car and look at the battery. The green or white formations you see around the anode and cathode, on the top and sides is 'sulphation'. Sulphation means your battery is collecting mud... the plates are flaking and the battery is dying! UNLESS YOU ADD "VX/6" IMMEDIATELY, YOU WILL HAVE TO SPEND \$25.00 to \$40.00 FOR A NEW BATTERY!

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Yes, the most famous insurance company on the globe—Lloyd's of London—have insured "VX/6" against failure. It's also approved by the Miami Motor Business Bureau. It's also approved by the "Public Service"... YOU KNOW that if it doesn't do everything we claim... you get your money back now... next year... in 1960 or in 1967. No new product was ever endorsed by so many glass companies, was ever used by so many countries and leaders of industry!

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"I don't want to bother him. I'm trying to land a serial job. . . ."

"Yes," Hunt smiled. "I've heard about it; I'd like to see your work."

Molly got up and held out her hands to both of them, she smiled sweetly, "I'm tired and I have to do some copy tonight. I'm going to leave the artists together."

"Lunch tomorrow, Molly?" Hunt watched her closely.

"I'd like it. Night both of you."

At the door Jack held her hand for a moment, "I see," he said softly, "that you forgot to tell me a few things, too."

Chapter 4

THINGS went better the next day. Molly was beginning to think ruefully that if she didn't forget Jack during working hours, she wouldn't have many working hours left before she was fired. She repaired her makeup hastily, adjusted her small hat to the proper angle, and dashed downstairs to meet Hunt for luncheon.

They went to the Tavern where Hunt had had a table reserved, but Molly wasn't hungry. The excellent food held no appeal for her; she remembered the really horrible beans and cheese she had eaten with so much pleasure with Jack.

Hunt kept up a steady flow of talk. Molly had a feeling that he was trying to cover her own quietness and she was grateful. They were ordering dessert when a gay voice said "Hello There," and Kit stood beside their table, smiling down at both of them.

Hunt rose to his feet hastily, and the waiter brought a chair for Kit. She waved away service. "I've finished lunch," she told Hunt, "I just want to speak to Molly."

Hunt looked undecided. He glanced at his watch. "I guess I should be getting back."

Kit laughed. "You're not in the way, Hunt, if that's what you mean. Relax.

I wanted to talk to Molly about our wonder boy, Jack."

Molly flushed. "Yes?" she said politely.

"I want you to help me make him forget this silly painting idea. He should go back home. He's giving up a lot of money," she said frankly. "He'll get tired of it and he never would have the least interest in it anyway."

"I can't see what affair it is of mine," Molly stated flatly.

"You seemed interested enough yesterday," Kit pointed out, and Molly again flushed. Kit turned to Hunt. "And now I'm all finished with my little speech, I think I'd like a Creme de Menthe frappe."

Hunt looked at her with obvious appeal. "You don't mince your words, do you?"

Kit shrugged. "I'm going to marry Jack, and I believe I have a right to interfere." Her small face hardened. "But I'll have no part of him unless he gives up this crazy art career."

Molly wondered bitterly if Jack quite knew what was going on in Kit's pretty head.

That night no light shone from Jack's place, everything was deadly quiet. Molly knew he must be out with Kit, and she wished it didn't matter. She wished a lot of things, among which that her heart would behave whenever she thought about the man. She went to bed early, and strangely enough, fell asleep almost immediately.

On Monday when she came out of her office, Jack was waiting for her. He was eager and beaming. He drew her over to a corner of the corridor and showed her his finished sketches.

"Oh, Jack," she breathed, "they are good, really good."

"Come on along with me," he invited, "for luck."

They found a taxicab and went up to 57th Street. Her hands were like ice, and she kept her fingers crossed. When they reached the smart recep-

[Turn To Page 88]

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IDEAL LOVE STORIES

tion room, she sat down in one of the chairs. "Good luck, Jack," she smiled, and he went into the office.

It seemed as if time would never pass. She kept looking at her wrist watch, and finally when Jack did return she was so deep in her own thoughts that she didn't see him until he was practically beside her. Then she stared. His face was dark with rage. It stopped the question on her lips. As he held the door open for her, she walked ahead of him without a sound, puzzled and bewildered.

He didn't say a word until they were in a cab. Then Molly said "What gives, Jack?"

He turned a look on her of pure dislike. "One thing I like about women," he said, "is the way they do things, all nice and underhanded."

Molly's temper broke. "For Heaven's sake," she snapped, "what are you talking about? I think you're crazy."

"Yes, I guess I am. I guess I was crazy to have trusted you."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Molly said wearily.

He gave a short laugh. "Let's not go over it," he said. "You've done what you've wanted to do. Hunt has a job and that's all that matters, isn't it?"

Molly caught her breath. "But why should Hunt have the job? I mean—"

"You mean," he broke in furiously. "that you didn't know that Hunt had presented sketches for the serial? And that his ideas of how it should be illustrated are just like mine? You don't even remember that Hunt said he knew about the job?"

"No, Jack, no." Suddenly she withdrew into herself. "You don't believe me," she said.

"I can't believe you," he answered doggedly.

"That's fine," she smiled through

[Turn To Page 90]

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her hurt. "That makes it all very simple. Now I don't have to deny anything."

She unlocked her door and Jack clumped up the stairs. When she was inside her apartment, she let the tears come. She felt that she hated herself, and the world, and Jack, most of all.

IT WAS HUNT, however, who had to do the explaining. A furious Molly confronted him the next day. There were people around and Hunt said "All right, Molly; I'll explain everything tonight."

He tried. He poured out words to a cold unreasoning Molly. "It isn't because I couldn't do as good a job

as Jack," he said slowly. "My own ideas might have been better; but I wanted to get him to go back to the bottle works."

"Why? Why?" she demanded.

"Because," he said slowly, "you're not the Molly I know. You're nothing but the portrait of a girl in love. Let Jack take his Kit and go away. I'm in love with you, Molly: I want to marry you and I will."

"Your confidence is touching, if misplaced," she said, turning her back on him and looking out the casement windows. "I'm in love with Jack," she told him, "and that's that. Making me hate you won't change things."

[Turn To Page 92]



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IDEAL LOVE STORIES

There was a long silence which Hunt finally broke. "All right," he said, "I'll tell Jack the truth. I'll fix things up," he said bitterly. "If you want him that badly, I'll help you try to get him."

"No," Molly shook her head. She shook it slowly, as if the physical action helped. "If he doesn't trust me—if he thinks I'd do such a low down thing, then—well, there's nothing more to be said. Even if he doesn't love me, he could have at least trusted me. I won't go crawling." She hardly heard Hunt's faint protestations. She stood looking out the windows, and stayed that way as time passed.

The apartment grew cold. Then she shivered, and knew that she must get ready for bed. She had a job to take care of in the morning.

THE DAYS passed slowly, and they were unhappy ones for Molly. For the first time in her life, she was in love. She felt that not only Jack didn't love her, but he didn't trust her; it was a bitter thing to know. She did her work mechanically, and somewhat to her surprise, well. She hated to go home to her apartment and she found all sorts of excuses to stay away.

This evening, as she came in the front door, she looked at her wrist watch. Eleven o'clock. She had eaten dinner out and gone to a picture show all by herself. Now there was nothing left to do but go upstairs and go to bed.

She could hear the sound of tapping even before she unlocked her door, and when she went in to her apartment, the thumping on the radiator had a soft and definite rhythm. Her heart-beat quickened because she knew it was Jack. She paid no attention and the tapping continued for some time; but finally it became quiet.

She was unwrapping a package of bath salts when her bell rang. She put
[Turn To Page 94]

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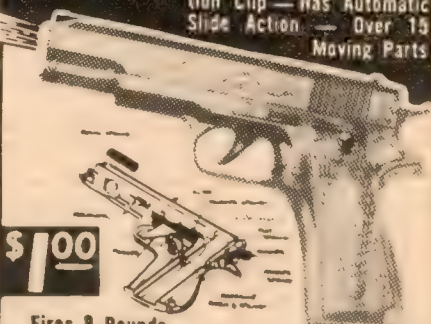
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IDEAL LOVE STORIES

it down hurriedly and looked into the bathroom mirror. She gave her hair a couple of fast touches and smoothed her lipstick because it was probably Jack ringing her bell.

When she opened the door, he hesitated until she invited him in. She noticed that he was limping badly. He smiled at her cautiously and pointed to his ankle. "The dope slipped and sprained his ankle," he said.

"That's too bad," she said automatically. "Would you like a cushion or two under it?"



He shook his head. "I'd like only one thing, Molly. Your forgiveness."

"Naturally," she said calmly, "you have my forgiveness. One doesn't hold a grudge, does one?"

He rubbed his hand across his forehead. "Lord knows I deserve this," he said, "you see, darling!" She wondered if he realized he had called her darling. "You see, darling, it wasn't only the fact that I thought you had double-crossed me, but it was one of the sketches Hunt had thrown in."

Molly raised a polite eyebrow.

"It burned me up," he said honestly. "It showed a lovely girl—you, actually—holding streamers at the ends of which dangled a car, jewels, a man

[Turn To Page 96]

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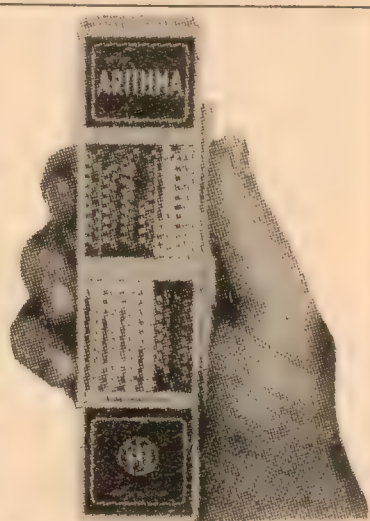
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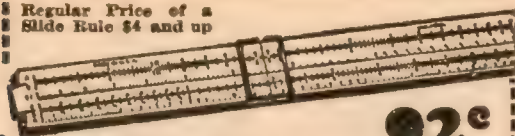
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IDEAL LOVE STORIES

—and it was your face that had been drawn on the sketch. It hurt mostly because I'm in love with you."

"In love with me?" Molly asked stupidly. "In love with me?"

He nodded. "Yes, Molly, I'm in love with you."

"But how can you be? I mean—" she floundered, "what about Kit?"

"Kit's a nice gal," Jack admitted, "but she's in love with the bottling works, not me."

"And I presume you think I'm in love with you?" Molly's face flamed.

"I had hoped so," he corrected gently. "I had hoped so with all my heart."

Suddenly he grinned. "I brought my sketches to another art director, one with whom I had had no contact whatsoever. I couldn't use the same ideas for him, of course, but it gave him an idea of my work. He gave me an assignment and I finished it today, Molly. I brought it to the office, and I'll have a job now with more money and more prestige than the other. But I won't go back to the bottle plant, not ever."

"Jack," Molly's eyes glowed, "say it again. I mean, tell me that you love me."

Instead he took her into his arms and she lifted her lips to his. "Oh, Jack," she said passionately, "I thought I'd die. I loved you so much." Suddenly she frowned. "What about Kit? Are you still engaged to her?"

"Silly, I'm engaged to you, aren't I? Don't worry about Kit, darling. Hunt will take good care of her. I think he feels pretty bad about his part. You do love me, don't you, Molly?"

"You're a little stupid, Jack, not to have known it all along," Molly said serenely, "but I have a lot of time to convince you."

Once again she lifted her lips to his.

THE END



Certainty

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False fears, that may needless prove.
No foeman can ever sever,
Two hearts that are leal and true.
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And you remember today,
No doubt, by the months begotten,
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The thought of our one-time bliss.
You need but the trust that measures
All that was meant by my kiss.

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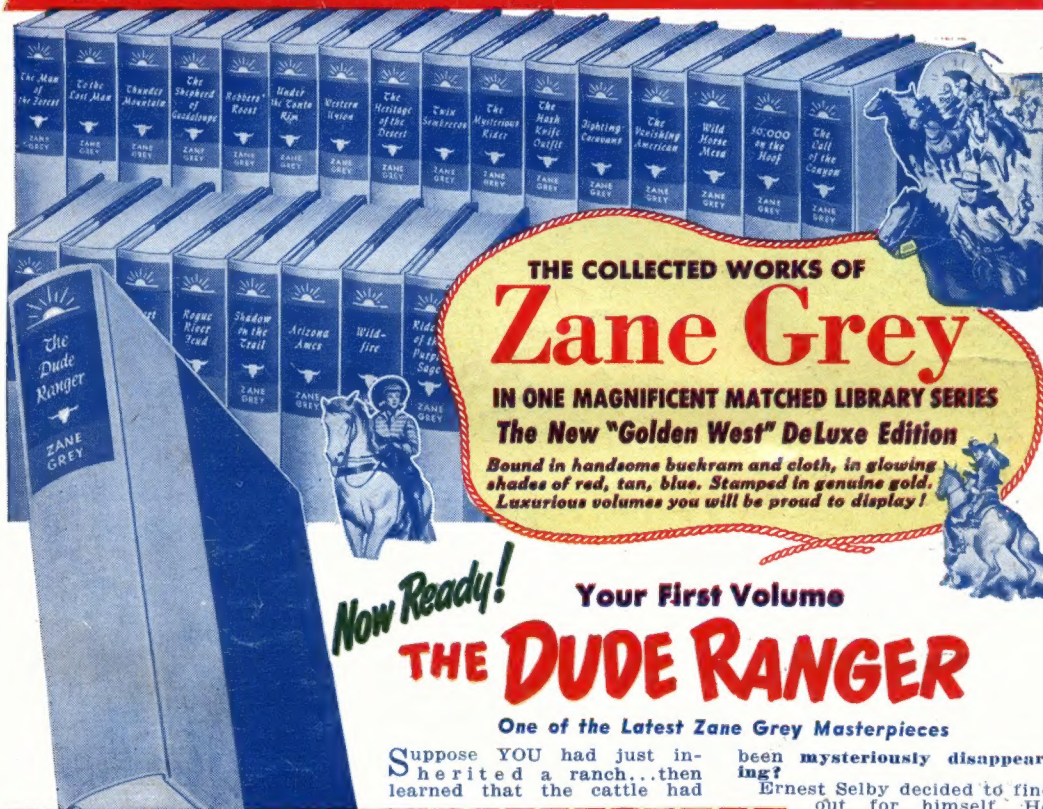
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